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MEETING HER FATE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"AURORA FLOYD."

MARY E. BRADDON

"When Love once pleads admission to our hearts,
In spite of all the virtue we can boast,
The woman who deliberates is lost."

Addison.

NEW-YORK

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CHAPTER I.

I BEGIN LIFE.

WAS just nineteen years of age when I began my career as articled pupil with the Miss Bagshots of Albury Lodge, Fendale, Yorkshire. My father was a country curate, with a delicate wife and four children, of whom I was the eldest; and I had known from my childhood that the day must come in which I should have to get my own living in almost the only vocation open to a poor gentleman's daughter. I had been fairly educated near home, and the first opportunity that arose for placing me out in the world had been gladly seized upon by my poor father, who consented to pay the modest premium required by the Miss Bagshots, in order that I might be taught the duties of a governess, and essay my powers of tuition upon the younger pupils at Albury Lodge.

How well I remember the evening of my arrival!—a bleak, dreary evening at the close of January, made still more dismal by a drizzling rain that had never ceased falling since I left my father's snug little house at Briarwood, in Warwickshire. I had had to change trains three times, and to wait during a blank and miserable hour and a quarter, or so, at small obscure stations, staring hopelessly at the advertisements on the walls—advertisements of somebody's life-sustaining cocoa, and some-

body else's health-restoring cod-liver oil, or trying to read the big brown-backed Bible in the cheerless little waiting-room; and trying, O so hard, not to think of home, and all the love and happiness I had left behind me. The journey had been altogether tiresome and fatiguing; but, for all that, the knowledge that I was near my destination brought me no sense of pleasure. I think I should have wished that dismal journey prolonged indefinitely, if I could thereby have escaped the beginning of my new life.

A lumbering omnibus conveyed me from the station to Albury Lodge, after depositing a grim-looking elderly lady at a house on the outskirts of the town, and a dapper-looking little man, whom I took for a commercial traveller, at an inn in the market-place. I watched the road with a kind of idle curiosity as the vehicle lumbered along. The town had a cheerful, prosperous air even on this wet winter night, and I saw that there were two fine old churches, and a large modern building which I supposed to be the town-hall.

We left the town quite behind us before we came to Albury Lodge; a very large house on the high-road, a square red-brick house of the early Georgian era, shut in from the road by high walls. The great wrought-iron gates in the front had been boarded up, and Albury Lodge was now approached by a little wooden side-door opening into a stone-flagged covered passage that led to a small door at the end of the house. The omnibus-driver deposited me at this door, with all my worldly possessions, which at this period of my life consisted of two rather small boxes and a japanned dressing-case, a receptacle that contained all my most sacred treasures.

I was admitted by a rather ill-tempered-looking housemaid, with a cap of obtrusive respectability and a spotless white apron. I fancied that she looked just a little superciliously at my boxes, which I dare say would not have contained her own wardrobe.

"O, it's the governess-pupil, I suppose?" she said. "You was expected early this afternoon, miss. Miss Bagshot and Miss Susan are gone out to tea; but I can show you where you are

to sleep, if you'll please to step this way. Do you think you could carry one of your trunks, if I carry the other?"

I thought I could; so the housemaid and I lugged them all the way along the stone passage and up an uncarpeted back staircase which led from the lobby into which the door at the end of the passage opened. We went very high up, to the top story in fact, where the housemaid led me into a long bare room with ten little beds in it. I was well enough accustomed to the dreariness of a school dormitory, but somehow this room looked unusually dismal.

There was a jet of gas burning at one end of the room, near a door opening into a lavatory which was little more than a cupboard, but in which ten young ladies had to perform their daily ablutions. Here I washed my face and hands in icy-cold water, and arranged my hair as well as I could without the aid of a looking-glass, that being a luxury not provided at Albury Lodge. The servant stood watching me as I made this brief toilet, waiting to conduct me to the schoolroom. I followed her, shivering as I went, to a great empty room on the first floor. The holidays were not quite over, and none of the pupils had as yet returned. There was an almost painful neatness and bareness in place of the usual litter of books and papers, and I could not help thinking that an apartment in a workhouse would have looked quite as cheerful. Even the fire behind the high wire guard seemed to burn in a different manner from all home fires; a fact which I attributed then to some sympathetic property in the coal, but which I afterwards found to be caused by a plentiful admixture of coke; a slow sulky smoke went up from the dull mass of fuel, brightened ever so little now and then by a sickly yellow flame. One jet of gas dimly lighted this long dreary room, in which there was no human creature but myself and my guide.

"I'll bring you some supper presently, miss," the housemaid said, and departed before I could put in a timid plea for that feminine luxury, a cup of tea.

I had not expected to find myself quite alone on this first

night of my arrival, and a feeling of hopeless wretchedness came over me as I sat down at one end of a long green-baize-covered table, and rested my head upon my folded arms. Of course it was very weak and foolish, and a bad beginning of my new life, but I was quite powerless to contend against that sense of utter misery. I thought of all I had left at home. I thought of what my life might have been if my father had been only a little better off: and then I burst out crying as if my heart were breaking.

Suddenly, in the midst of that foolish paroxysm, I felt a light hand upon my shoulder, and looking up, saw a face bending over me, a face full of sympathy and compassion.

O Milly Darrell, my darling, my love, how am I to describe you as you appeared before my eyes that night? How poorly can any words of mine paint you in your girlish beauty, as you looked down upon me in that dimly-lighted schoolroom with divine compassion in your dark eloquent eyes!

Just at that moment I was so miserable and so inclined to be sulky in my wretchedness, that even the vision of that bright face gave me little pleasure. I pushed away the gentle hand ungraciously, and rose hastily from my seat.

"Pray don't cry any more," said the young lady; "I can't bear to hear you cry like that."

"I'm not going to cry any more," I answered, drying my eyes in a hasty, angry way. "It was very foolish of me to cry at all; but this place did look so cheerless and dreary, and I began to think of my father and mother, and all I had left behind me at home."

"Of course it was only natural you should think of them. Everything does seem so bleak and dismal the first night; but you are very happy to have so many at home. I have only papa."

"Indeed!" I said, not feeling deeply interested in her affairs.

I looked at her as she stood leaning a little against the end of the table, and playing idly with a bunch of charms and lockets hanging to her gold chain. She was very handsome, a

brunette, with a small straight nose, hazel eyes, and dark-brown hair. Her mouth wes the prettiest and most expressive I ever saw in my life, and gave an indescribable charm to her face. She was handsomely dressed in violet silk, with rich white lace about the throat and sleeves.

"You will find things much pleasanter when the girls come back. Of course school is always a little dreary compared with home; one is prepared for that; but I have no doubt you will contrive to be happy, and I hope we shall be very good friends. I think you must be the Miss Crofton I have heard spoken of lately?"

"Yes, my name is Crofton—Mary Crofton."

"And mine is Emily Darrell. Milly I am always called at home, and by any one who likes me. I am a parlor-boarder, and have the run of the house, as it were. I am rather old to be at school, you see; but I am going home at the end of this year. I was brought up at home with a governess until about six months ago; but then papa took it into his head that I should be happier amongst girls of my own age, and sent me off to school. He has been travelling since that time, and so I have not been home for the Christmas holidays. I can't tell you what a disappointment that was."

I tried to look sympathetic, and, not knowing exactly what to say, I asked whether Miss Darrell's father lived in that neighborhood.

"O dear, no," she answered; "he lives nearly a hundred miles away, in a very wild part of Yorkshire, not far from the sea. But Thornleigh—that is the name of our house—is a dear old place, and I like our bleak wild country better than the loveliest spot in the world. I was born there, you see, and all my happy memories of my childhood and my mother are associated with that dear old home."

"Is it long since you lost your mother?"

"Ten years. I loved her so dearly. There are some subjects about which one dare not speak. I cannot often trust myself to talk of her."

I liked her the better after this. At first her beauty and her handsome dress had seemed a little overpowering to me; I had felt as if she were a being of another order, a bright, happy creature not subject to the common woes of life. But now that she had spoken of her own sorrows, I felt that we were upon a level; and I stole my hand timidly into hers, and murmured some apology for my previous rudeness.

"You were not rude, dear. I know I must have seemed very intrusive when I disturbed you; but I could not bear to hear you crying like that. And now tell me where you sleep."

I described the room as well as I could.

"I know where you mean," she said; "it's close to my room. I have the privilege of a little room to myself, you know; and on half-holidays I have a fire there, and write my letters, or paint; and you must come and sit with me on those afternoons, and we can be as happy as possible together working and talking. Do you paint?"

"A little—in a schoolgirlish sort of way."

"Quite as well as I do, I daresay," Miss Darrell answered, laughing gaily, "only you are more modest about it. O, here comes your supper; may I sit with you while you eat it?"

"I shall be very glad if you will."

"I hope you have brought Miss Crofton a good supper, Sarah," she went on in the same gay girlish way.—"Sarah is a very good creature, you must know, Miss Crofton, though she seems a little grim to strangers. That's only a way of hers: she *can* smile, I assure you, though you'd hardly think so."

Sarah's hard-looking mouth expanded into a kind of grin at this.

"There's no getting over you, Miss Darrell," she said; "you've got such a way of your own. I've brought Miss Crofton some cold beef; but if she'd like a bit of pickle, I wouldn't mind going to ask cook for it. Cold meat does eat a little dry without pickle."

This "bit of pickle" was evidently a concession in my favor made to please Emily Darrell. I thanked Sarah, and told her

that I would not trouble her with a journey to the cook. I was faint and worn-out with my day's pilgrimage, and had eaten very little since morning; but the most epicurean repast ever prepared by a French chef would have seemed so much dust and ashes to me that night; so I sat down meekly to my supper of bread and meat, and listened to Milly Darrell's chatter as I ate it.

Of course she told me all about the school, Miss Bagshot, and Miss Susan Bagshot. The elder of these two ladies was her favorite. Miss Susan had, in the remote period of her youth, been the victim of some unhappy love-affair, which had soured her disposition and inclined her to look on the joys and follies of girlhood with a jaundiced eye. It was easy enough to please Miss Bagshot, who had a genial matronly way, and took real delight in her pupils; but it was almost impossible to satisfy Miss Susan.

"And I'm sorry to say that you will be a good deal with her," Miss Darrell said, shaking her head gravely; "for you are to take the second English class under her—I heard them say so at dinner to-day—and I am afraid she will fidget you almost out of your life; but you must try to keep your temper, and take things as quietly as you can, and I daresay in time you will be able to get on with her."

"I'm sure I hope so," I answered rather sadly; and then Miss Darrell asked me how long I was to be at Albury Lodge.

"Three years," I told her; "and after that, Miss Bagshot is to place me somewhere as a governess."

"You are going to be a governess always?"

"I suppose so," I answered. The word "always" struck me with a little sharp pain, almost like a wound. Yes, I supposed it would be always. I was neither pretty nor attractive. What issue could there be for me out of that dull hackneyed round of daily duties which makes up the sum of a governess's life?

"I am obliged to do something for my living," I said; "my father is very poor. I hope I may be able to help him a little by and by."

"And my father is so ridiculously rich. He is a great iron master, and has wharves and warehouses, and goodness knows what, at North Shields. How hard it seems!"

"What seems hard?" I asked absently.

"That money should be so unequally divided. Do you know, I don't think I should much mind going out as a governess: it would be a way of seeing life. One must meet with all sorts of adventures, going among strangers like that."

I looked at her as she smiled at me, with a smile that gave an indescribable brightness to her face, and I fancied that for her indeed there could be no form of life so dull that would not hold some triumph, some success. She seemed a creature born to extract brightness out of the commonest things, a creature to be only admired and caressed, go where she might.

"You a governess!" I said a little scornfully; "you are not of the clay that makes governesses."

"Why not?"

"You are much too pretty and too fascinating."

"O, Mary Crofton, Mary Crofton—may I call you Mary, please? we are going to be such friends—if you begin by flattering me like that, how am I ever to trust you and lean upon you? I want some one with a stronger mind than my own, you know, dear, to lead me right; for I'm the weakest, vainest creature in the world, I believe. Papa has spoiled me so."

"If you are always like what you are to-night, I don't think the spoiling has done much mischief," I said.

"O, I am always amiable enough, so long as I have my own way. And now tell me all about your home."

I gave her a faithful account of my brothers and my sister, and a brief description of the dear old-fashioned cottage, with its white-plaster walls crossed with great black beams, its many gables and quaint latticed windows. I told her how happy and united we had always been at home, and how this made my separation from those I loved so much the harder to bear; to all of which Milly Darrell listened with most unaffected sympathy.

Early the next day my new life began in real earnest. Miss

Susan Bagshot did not allow me to waste my time in idleness until the arrival of my pupils. She gave me a pile of exercises to correct, and some difficult needlework to finish; and I found I had indeed a sharp taskmistress in this blighted lady.

"Girls of your age are so incorrigibly idle," she said; "but I must give you to understand at once that you will have no time for dawdling at Albury Lodge. The first bell rings at a quarter before six, and at a quarter past I shall expect to see you in the schoolroom. You will superintend the younger pupils' pianoforte practice from that time till eight o'clock, at which hour we breakfast. From nine till twelve you will take the second division of the second class for English, according to the routine arranged by me, which you had better copy from a paper I will lend you for that purpose. After dinner you will take the same class for two hours' reading until four; from four to five you will superintend the needle-work class. Your evenings—with the exception of the careful correction of all the day's exercises—will be your own. I hope you have a sincere love of your vocation, Miss Crofton."

I said that I hoped I should grow to like my work as I became accustomed to it. I had never yet tried teaching, except with my young sister and brothers. My heart sank as I remembered our free-and-easy studies in the sunny parlor at home, or out in the garden under the pink and white hawthorns sometimes on balmy mornings in the early summer.

Miss Susan shook her head doubtfully.

"Unless you have a love of your vocation you will never succeed, Miss Crofton," she said solemnly.

I freely confess that this love she spoke of never came to me. I tried to do my duty, and I endured all the hardships of my life in, I hope, a cheerful spirit. But the dry monotony of the studies had no element of pleasantness, and I used to wonder how Miss Susan could derive pleasure—as it was evident she did—from the exercise of her authority over those hapless scholars who had the misfortuue to belong to her class. Day after day they heard the same lectures, listened submissively to

the same reproofs, and toiled on upon that bleak, bare high-road to learning, along which it was her delight to drive them. Nothing like a flower brightened their weary way—it was all alike dust and barrenness; but they ploughed on dutifully, cramming their youthful minds with the hardest dates and facts to be found in the history of mankind, the dreariest statistics, the driest details of geography, and the most recondite rules of grammar, until the happy hour arrived in which they took their final departure from Albury Lodge, to forget all they had learnt there in the briefest possible time.

How my thoughts used to wander away sometimes as I sat at my desk, distracted by the unmelodious sound of Miss Susan's voice lecturing some victim in her own division at the next table, while one of the girls in mine droned drearily at Lingard, or Pinnock's *Goldsmith*, as the case might be! How the vision of my own bright home haunted me during those long monotonous afternoons, while the march winds made the poplars rock in the garden outside the schoolroom, or the April rain beat against the great bare windows!

CHAPTER II.

MILLY'S VISITOR.

It was not often that I had a half-holiday to myself, for Miss Susan Bagshot seemed to take a delight in finding me something to do on these occasions; but whenever I had, I spent it with Milly Darrell, and on these rare afternoons I was perfectly happy. I had grown to love as I did not think it was in me to love any one who was not of my own flesh and blood; and in so loving her, I only returned the affection which she felt for me.

I am sure it was the fact of my friendlessness, and of my subordinate position in the school, which had drawn this girl's generous heart towards me; and I should have been hard indeed if I had not felt touched by her regard. She soon grew indescribably dear to me. She was of my own age, able to sympathize with every thought and fancy of mine; the frankest,

most open-hearted of creatures; a little proud of her beauty perhaps, when it was praised by those she loved, but never proud of her wealth, or insolent to those whose gifts were less than hers.

I used to write my home-letters in her room on these rare and happy afternoons, while she painted at an easel near the window. The room was small, but better furnished than the ordinary rooms in the house, and it was brightened by all sorts of pretty things,—handsomely-bound books upon hanging shelves, pictures, Dresden cups and saucers, toilet-bottles and boxes, which Miss Darrell had brought from home. Over the mantelpiece there was a large photograph of her father, and by the bedside there hung a more flattering water-colored portrait, painted by Milly herself. It was a powerful and rather a handsome face, but I thought the expression a little hard and cold, even in Milly's portrait.

She painted well, and had a real love of art. Her studies at Albury Lodge were of rather a desultory kind, as she was not supposed to belong to any class; but she had lessons from nearly half-a-dozen different masters—German lessons, Italian lessons, drawing lessons, music and singing lessons—and was altogether a very profitable pupil. She had her own way with every one, I found, and I believe Miss Bagshot was really fond of her.

Her father was travelling in Italy at this time, and did not often write to her—a fact that distressed her very much, I know; but she used to shake off her sorrow in a bright, hopeful way that was peculiar to her, always making excuses for the dilatory correspondent. She loved him intensely, and keenly felt this separation from him; but the doctors had recommended him rest and change of air and scene, she told me, and she was glad to think he was obeying them.

Upon one of these half-holidays, when midsummer was near at hand, we were interrupted by an unwonted event, in the shape of a visit from a cousin of Milly's; a young man who occupied an important position in her father's house of business,

and of whom she had sometimes talked to me, but not much. His name was Julian Stormont, and he was the only son of Mr. Darrell's only sister, long since dead.

It was a sultry afternoon, and we were spending it in a rustic summer-house at the end of a broad gravel walk that went the whole length of the large garden. Milly had her drawing materials on the table before her, but had not been using them. I was busy with a piece of fancy-work which Miss Susan Bagshot had given me to finish. We were sitting like this, when my old acquaintance Sarah, the housemaid, came to announce a visitor for Miss Darrell.

Milly sprang to her feet, flushed with excitement. "It must be papa!" she cried joyfully.

"Lor', no, miss; don't you go to excite yourself like that. It isn't your pa; it's a younger gentleman."

She handed Milly a card.

"Mr. Stormont!" the girl exclaimed, with a disappointed air; "my cousin Julian. I am coming to him, of course, Sarah. But I wish you had given me the card at once."

"Won't you go and do somethink to your hair, miss? most young ladies do."

"O yes, I know; there are girls who would stop to have their hair done in Grecian plaits, if the dearest friend they had in the world was waiting for them in the drawing-room. My hair will do well enough, Sarah.—Come, Mary, you'll come to the house with me, won't you?"

"Lor', miss, here comes the gentleman," said Sarah; and then decamped by an obscure side-path.

"I had better leave you to see him alone, Milly," I said; but she told me imperatively to stay, and I stayed.

She went a little way to meet the gentleman, who seemed pleased to see her, but whom she received rather coldly, as I thought. But I had not long to think about it, before she had brought him to the summer-house, and introduced him to me.

"My cousin Julian—Miss Crofton."

He bowed rather stiffly, and then seated himself by his

cousin's side, and put his hat upon the table before him. I had plenty of time to look at him as he sat there talking of all sorts of things connected with Thornleigh, and Miss Darrell's friends in that neighborhood. He was very good-looking, fair and pale, with regular well-cut features, and rather fine blue eyes; but I fancied those clear blue eyes had a cold look, and that there was an expression of iron will about the mouth and powerful prominent chin. The upper part of the face was thoughtful, and there were lines already on the high white forehead, from which the thin straight chestnut hair was carefully brushed. It was the face of a very clever man, I thought; but I was not so sure that it was the face of a man I could like, or whom I should be inclined to trust.

Mr. Stormont had a low, pleasant voice, and an agreeable manner of speaking. His way of treating his cousin was half deferential, half playful; but once, when I looked up suddenly from my work, I seemed to catch a glimpse of a deeper meaning in the cold blue eyes—a look of singular intensity fixed on Milly's bright face.

Whatever this look might mean, she was unconscious of it; she went on talking gaily of Thornleigh, and her Thornleigh friends.

"I do so want to come home, Julian," she said. "Do you think there is any hope for me this midsummer?"

"I think there is every hope. I think it is almost certain you will come home."

"O Julian, how glad I am!"

"But suppose there should be a surprise for you when you come home, Milly,—a change that you may not quite like, at first?"

"What change?"

"Has your father told you nothing?"

"Nothing, except about his journeys from place to place, and not much about them. He has written very seldom during the last six months."

"He has been too much engaged, I suppose; and it's rather

like him to have said nothing about it. How would you like a stepmother, Milly?"

She gave a little cry, and grew suddenly pale.

"Papa has married again!" she said.

Julian Stormont drew a newspaper from his pocket, and laid it before her, pointing to an announcement in one column:

"On May 18th, at the English Legation in Paris, William Darrell, Esq., of Thornleigh, Yorkshire, to Augusta, daughter of the late Theodore Chester, Esq., of Regent's Park."

He read this aloud very slowly, watching Milly's pale face as he read.

"There is no reason why this should distress you, my dear child," he said. "It was only to be expected that your father would marry again, sooner or later."

"I have lost him!" she cried piteously.

"Lost him!"

"Yes; he can never be again the same to me that he has been. His new wife will come between us. No, Julian, I am not jealous. I do not grudge him his happiness, if this marriage can make him happy. I only feel that I have lost him for ever."

"My dear Milly, that is utterly unreasonable. Your father told me most particularly to assure you of his unaltered affection, when I broke the news of this marriage to you. He was naturally a little nervous about doing it himself."

"You must never let him know what I have said, Julian. He will never hear any expression of regret from me; and I will try to do my duty to this strange lady. Have you seen her yet?"

"No, they have not come home yet. They were in Switzerland when I heard of them last; but they are expected in a week or two. Come, my dear Milly, don't look so serious. I trust this marriage may turn out for your happiness, as well as for your father's. Rely upon it, you will find no change in his feelings towards you."

"He will always be kind and good to me, I know," she

answered sadly. "It is not possible for him to be anything but that; but I can never be his companion again as I have been. There is an end to all that."

"That was a kind of association which could not be supposed to last all your life, Milly. It is to be hoped that somebody else will have a claim upon your companionship before many years have gone by."

"I suppose you mean that I shall marry," she said, looking at him with supreme indifference.

"Something like that, Milly."

"I have always fancied myself living all my life with papa. I have never thought it possible that I could care for any one but him."

Julian Stormont's face darkened a little, and he sat silent for some minutes, folding and refolding the newspaper in a nervous way.

"You are not very complimentary to your admirers at Thornleigh," he said at last, with a short hoarse laugh.

"Who is there at Thornleigh? Have I really any admirers there?"

"I think I could name half-a-dozen."

"Never mind them just now. I want you to tell me all you know about my stepmother."

"That amounts to very little. All I can tell you is, that she is the daughter of a gentleman, highly accomplished, without money, and four-and-twenty years of age. She was travelling as companion to an elderly lady when your father met her in a picture-gallery at Florence. He knew the old lady, I believe, and by that means became acquainted with the younger one."

"Only four-and-twenty! only four years older than I!"

"Rather young, is it not?" but when a man of your father's age makes a second marriage, he is apt to marry a young woman. Of course this is quite a love-match."

"Yes, quite a love match," Milly repeated with a sigh.

I knew she could not help that natural pang of jealousy, as she thought how she and her father had once been all the

world to each other. She had told me so often of their happy companionship, the perfect confidence that had existed between them.

Julian Stormont sat talking to her—and a little, a very little, to me—for about half an hour longer, and then departed. He was to sleep at Fendale, and go back to North Shields next morning. He was his uncle's right hand in the business, Milly told me; and from the little I had seen of him I could fancy him a power in any sphere.

"Papa has a very high opinion of him," she said, when we were talking of him after he had left us.

"And you like him very much, I suppose?"

"O yes, I like him very well. I have known him all my life. We are almost like brother and sister; only Julian is one of those thoughtful reserved persons one does not get on with very fast."

CHAPTER III.

AT THORNLEIGH.

THE midsummer holidays began at last, and Mr. Darrell came in person to fetch his daughter, much to her delight. She was not to return to school any more unless she liked, he told her. Her new mamma was most anxious to receive her, and she could have masters at Thornleigh to complete her education, if it were not already finished.

Her eyes were full of tears when she came to tell me this, and carry me off to the drawing-room to introduce me to her father, an introduction she insisted upon making in spite of my entreaties,—for I was rather shy at this period of my life, and dreaded an encounter with a stranger.

Mr. Darrell received me most graciously. He was a tall, fine-looking man, very like the photograph in Milly's bedroom, and I detected the hard look about the mouth which I had noticed in both portraits. He seemed remarkably fond of his daughter; and I have never seen a prettier picture than she made as she

stood beside him, clinging to his arm, and looking lovingly up at him with her dark hazel eyes.

He asked me where I was to spend my holidays; and on hearing that I was to stay at Albury Lodge, asked whether I would like to come to Thornleigh with Milly for the midsummer vacation. My darling clapped her hands gaily as he made this offer, and cried,—

"O yes, Mary, you will come, won't you?—You dear kind papa, that is just like you, always able to guess what one wishes. There is nothing in the world I should like better than to have Mary at Thornleigh."

"Then you have only to pack a box with all possible expedition, and to come away with us, Miss Crofton," said Mr. Darrell; "the train starts in an hour and a half. I can only give you an hour."

I thanked him as well as I could—awkwardly enough, I daresay—for his kindness, and ran away to ask Miss Bagshot's consent to the visit. This she gave readily, in spite of some objections suggested by Miss Susan, and I had nothing more to do than to pack my few dresses—my two colored muslins, a white dress for festive occasions, a black-silk dress which was preëminently my "best," and some print morning-dresses—wondering as I packed them how these things would pass current among the grandeurs of Thornleigh. All this was finished well within the hour, and I put on my bonnet and shawl, and ran down—flushed with hurry and excitement, and very happy—to join my friends in the drawing-room.

Miss Bagshot was there, talking of her attachment to her sweet young friend, and her regret at losing her. Mr. Darrell cut these lamentations short when he found that I was ready, and we drove off to the station in the fly that had brought him to Albury Lodge.

I looked at the little station to-day with a very different feeling from that dull despondency which had possessed me six months before, when I arrived there in the bleak January weather. The thought of five weeks' respite from the monoto-

nous routine of Albury Lodge was almost perfect happiness. I did not forget those I loved at home, or cease to regret the poverty that prevented my going home for the holidays; but since this was impossible, nothing could have been pleasanter than the idea of the visit I was going to pay.

Throughout the journey Mr. Darrell was all that was gracious and kind. He talked a good deal of his wife; dwelling much upon her accomplishments and amiability, and assuring his daughter again and again that she could not fail to love her.

"I was a little bit of a coward in the business, I confess, Milly," he said, in the midst of this talk, "and hadn't courage to tell you anything till the deed was done; and then I thought it was as well to let Julian make the announcement."

"You ought to have trusted me better, papa," Milly said tenderly; and I knew what perfect self-abnegation there was in the happy smile with which she gave him her hand.

"And you are not angry with me, my darling?" he asked.

"Angry with you, papa?" as if I had any right to be angry with you! Only try to love me a little, as you used to do, and I shall be quite happy."

"I shall never love you less, my dear."

The journey was not a long one; and the country through which we passed was very fair to look upon in the bright June afternoon. The landscape changed when we were within about thirty miles of our destination: the fertile farm-lands and waving fields of green corn gave place to an open moor, and I felt from afar off the fresh breath of the ocean. This broad undulating moorland was new to me, and I thought there was a wild kind of beauty in its loneliness. As for Milly, she looked out at the moor with rapture, and strained her eyes to catch the first glimpse of the hills about Thornleigh—those hills of which she had talked to me so often in her little room at school.

The station we had to stop at was ten miles from Mr. Darrell's house, and a barouche-and-pair was waiting for us in the sunny road outside. We drove along a road that crossed the

moor, until we came to a little village of scattered houses, with a fine old church—at one end of which an ancient sacristy seemed mouldering slowly to decay. We drove past the gates of two or three rather important houses, lying half-hidden in their gardens, and then turned sharply off into a road that went up a hill, nearly at the top of which we came to a pair of noble old carved iron gates, surmounted with a coat-of-arms, and supported on each side by massive stone pillars, about which the ivy twined lovingly.

An old man came out of a pretty rustic-looking lodge and opened these gates, and we drove through an avenue of some extent, which led straight to the front of the house, the aspect of which delighted me. It was very old and massively built, and had quite a baronial look, I thought. There was a wide stone terrace with ponderous moss-grown stone balustrades round three sides of it, and at each angle a broad flight of steps leading down to a second terrace, with sloping green banks that melted into the turf of the lawn. The house stood on the summit of a hill, and from one side commanded a noble view of the sea.

A lady came out of the curious old stone porch as the carriage drove up, and stood at the top of the terrace steps waiting for us. I guessed immediately that this must be Mrs. Darrell.

Milly hung back a little shyly, as her father led her up the steps with her hand through his arm. She was very pale, and I could see that she was trembling. Mrs. Darrell came forward to her quickly, and kissed her.

"My darling Emily," she cried, "I am so delighted to see you at last.—O William, you did not deceive me when you promised me a beautiful daughter."

Milly blushed, and smiled at this compliment, but still clung to her father, with shy downcast eyes.

I had time to look at Mrs. Darrell while this introduction was being made. She was not by any means a beautiful woman, but she was what I suppose would have been called eminently interesting. She was tall and slim, very graceful-looking, with

a beautiful throat and a well-shaped head. Her features, with the exception of her eyes, were in no way remarkable; but those were sufficiently striking to give character to a face that might otherwise have been insipid. They were large luminous gray eyes, with black lashes, and rather strongly-marked brows of a much darker brown than her hair. That was of a nondescript shade, neither auburn nor chestnut, and with little light or color in its soft silky masses; but it seemed to harmonize very well with her pale complexion. Lavater has warned us to distrust any one whose hair and eyebrows are of a different color. I remembered this as I looked at Mrs. Darrell.

She was dressed in white; and I fancied the transparent muslin dress, with no other ornament than a lilac ribbon at the waist, was peculiarly becoming to her slender figure and delicate face. Her husband seemed to think so too, for he looked at her with a fond, admiring glance as he offered her his arm to return to the house.

"I mustn't forget to introduce Miss Crofton to you, Augusta," he said; "a school friend of Milly's, who has kindly accepted my invitation to spend the holidays with her."

Mrs. Darrell gave me her hand; but I fancied that she did so rather coldly, and I had an uneasy sense that I was not very welcome to the new mistress of Thornleigh.

"You will find your old rooms all ready for you, Milly," she said; "I suppose we had better put Miss Crofton in the blue room—next yours?"

"If you please, Mrs. Darrell."

"What, Milly, won't you call me mamma?"

Milly was silent for a few moments, with a pained expression in her face.

"Pray, forgive me," she said in a low voice; "I cannot call any one by that name."

Augusta Darrell kissed her again silently.

"It shall be as you wish, dear," she said, after a pause.

A rosy-cheeked, pleasant-looking girl, who had been accustomed to wait on Milly in the old time, came forward to meet us,

and ran before us to our rooms, expressing her delight at her young lady's return all the way she went.

The rooms were very pretty, and were situated in that portion of the house which looked towards the sea. There was a sitting-room, brightly furnished with some light kind of wool, and with chintz hangings all over rose-buds and butterflies. This had been Milly's schoolroom, and there were a good many books in two pretty-looking bookcases on each side of the fireplace. Besides these, there were some curious old cabinets full of shells and china. It was altogether the prettiest, most homelike room one could imagine.

Opening out of this, there was a large airy bedroom, with three windows commanding that glorious view of moorland and sea; and beyond that, a dainty little dressing-room. The next door in the corridor opened into the room that had been allotted to me; a large comfortable-looking room, in which there was an old-fashioned mahogany four-post bed with blue damask curtains.

I went to Milly's dressing-room when my own simple toilet was finished, and stood by the open window talking to her while she arranged her hair. She dismissed her little maid directly I went into the room, and I felt she had something to say to me.

"Well, Mary," she began at once, "what do you think of her?"

"Of Mrs. Darrell?"

"Of course."

"What opinion can I possibly form about her, after seeing her for three minutes, Milly? I think she is very elegant-looking. That is the only idea I have about her yet."

"Do you think she looks *true*, Mary? Do you think she has married papa because she loves him?"

"My dear child, how can I tell that? She is a great many years younger than your papa, but I do not see that the difference between them need be any real hindrance to her loving him. He is a man whom any woman might care for, I should think;

to say nothing of her natural gratitude towards the man who has rescued her from a position of dependence."

"Gratitude is all nonsense," Miss Darrell answered impatiently. "I want to know that my father is loved as he deserves to be loved. I shall never tolerate that woman unless I can feel sure of that."

"I believe you are prejudiced against her already, Milly," I said reproachfully.

"I daresay I am, Mary. I daresay I feel unjustly about her; but I don't like her face."

"What is there in her face that you don't like?"

"O, I can't tell you that—an undefinable something. I have a sort of conviction that she and I can never love each other."

"It is rather hard upon Mrs. Darrell to begin with such a feeling as that, Milly."

"I can't help it. Of course I shall try to do my duty to her, for papa's sake, and I shall do my best to conquer all these unchristian feelings. But we cannot command our hearts, you know, Mary, and I don't think I shall ever love my step mother."

She took me down to the drawing-room after this. It was half-past six, and we were to dine at seven. The drawing-room was a long room, with five windows opening on to the terrace, an old-fashioned-looking room with panelled walls and a fine arched ceiling. The wainscot was painted white, with gilt mouldings, and the cornice and architraves of the doors were elaborately carved. The furniture was white and gold like the walls, and in that spurious classical style which prevailed during the first French Empire. The window curtains and coverings of sofas and chairs were of dark green velvet.

A gentleman was standing in one of the open windows looking out at the garden. He turned as Milly and I went in, and I recognized Mr. Stormont. He came forward to shake hands with his cousin, and smiled his peculiar slow smile at her expression of surprise.

"You didn't know I was here, Milly?"

"No, indeed; I had no idea of seeing you."

"I wonder your father did not tell you of my visit. I came over this morning for a fortnight's holiday. I've been working a little harder than usual lately, and my uncle is good enough to say I have earned a rest."

"I wonder you don't go abroad for a change."

"I don't care about a change. I had much rather come to Thornleigh."

He looked at her very earnestly as he said this. I had been sure of it that afternoon when we all three sat in the summer-house at Albury Lodge, but I could see that Milly herself had no idea of the truth.

"Well, Milly, what do you think of your new mamma?" he asked presently.

"I had rather not tell you yet."

"Humph! that hardly sounds favorable to the lady. She seems to me a very charming person; but she is not my step-mother, and, of course, that makes a difference. Your father is intensely devoted."

Mr. Darrell came into the room a few minutes after this, and his wife followed him almost immediately. Milly placed herself next her father, and contrived to absorb his attention, not quite to the satisfaction of the elder lady, I fancied. Those bright gray eyes flashed upon my darling with a brief look of anger, which changed in the next moment to quiet watchfulness.

Mrs. Darrell stood by one of the tables, idly turning over some books and papers, and finding me seated near her, began to talk to me presently in a very gracious manner, asking me how I liked Thornleigh, and a few other questions of a stereotyped kind; but even while she talked, those watchful eyes were always turned towards the window where the father and daughter stood side by side. Mr. Stormont came over to her while she was talking to me, and joined in the conversation; in the midst of which a grave gray-haired old butler came to announce dinner.

Mr. Stormont offered his arm to the lady of the house, while

Mr. Darrell gave one arm to me and the other to his daughter; and we went down a long passage, at the end of which was the dining-room, a noble old room, with dark oak panelling and a great many pictures by the old masters, which were, no doubt, as valuable as they were dingy. We dined at an oval table, prettily decorated with flowers and with some very curious old silver.

There was a good deal of talk at dinner, in which I could take very little part. Mr. and Mrs. Darrell talked to Julian Stormont of their travels; and I must confess the lady talked well, with no affectation of enthusiasm, and with an evident knowledge and appreciation of the things she was speaking about. I envied her those wanderings in sunny foreign lands, even though they had been made in the company of an invalid dowager, and I wondered whether she would be happy in a settled existence at Thornleigh.

After dinner Milly took me out upon the terrace, and from thence we went to explore the gardens. We had not been out long before Julian Stormont came to join us. We had been talking pleasantly enough till he appeared, but his coming seemed to make us both silent, and he himself had a thoughtful air. I watched his pale face as he walked beside us in the twilight, and was again struck by the careworn look about the brow and the resolute expression of the mouth.

He was very fond of Milly. Of that fact there could be no possible doubt; and I think he had already begun to suffer keenly from the knowledge that his love was unreturned. That he hoped against hope at this time—that he counted fully on his power to win her in the future, I know. He was too wise to precipitate matters by an untimely avowal of his feelings. He waited with a quiet resolute patience which was a part of his nature.

Of course we talked a little, but it was in a straggling, desultory kind of way; and I think it was a relief to all of us when we finished the round of the gardens and went in through one of the drawing-room windows. The room was lighted with

lamps and candles placed about upon the tables, and Mrs. Darrell was sitting near her husband, employed upon some airy scrap of fancy-work, while he read his *Times*.

He asked for some music soon after we went in, and she rose to obey him with a charming air of submission. She played magnificently, with a power and style that were quite new to me, for I had heard no professional performers. She sang an Italian scena afterwards, in a rich mezzo-soprano, and with a kind of suppressed passion that impressed me deeply. I scarcely wondered, after hearing her play and sing, that Mr. Darrell had been fascinated by her. These gifts of hers were in themselves sufficient to subjugate a man who really cared for music.

Milly was charmed into forgetfulness of her prejudices. She went over to the piano and kissed her stepmother.

"Papa told me how clever you were," she said; "but he did not tell me you were a genius."

Mrs. Darrell received the compliment very modestly, and then tried to persuade Milly to sing or play; but the girl declined resolutely. Nothing could induce her to touch the piano after that brilliant performance.

The next day and several days passed very quietly, and in a kind of monotonous comfort. The rector of the parish dined with us one day, and on another a neighboring squire with his wife and three daughters. Milly and I spent a good deal of our time in the gardens and on the sea-shore, with Julian Stormont for our companion, while Mr. and Mrs. Darrell rode or drove together. My darling could see that she was not expected to join them in these rides and drives, and I think this confirmed her idea that her father was in a manner lost to her.

"I must try to be satisfied with this new state of things, Mary," she said, with a sigh of resignation. "If my father is happy, I ought to be contented. But O, my dear, if you could have seen us together a year ago, you would know how much I have lost."

I had been at Thornleigh a little more than a week, when

Mr. Darrell one morning proposed a drive to a place called Cumber Priory, which was one of the show-houses of the neighborhood. It was a very old place, he said, and had been one of the earliest monastic settlements in that part of the country. Milly and her father and her cousin had been there a great many times, and the visit was proposed for the gratification of Mrs. Darrell and myself.

She assented graciously, as she always did to every proposition of her husband's, and we started soon after breakfast in the barouche, with Julian Stormont on horseback. The drive was delightful; for, after leaving the hilly district about Thornleigh, our road lay through a wood, where the trees were of many hundred years' growth. I recognized groups of oak and beech that I had seen among the sketches in Milly's portfolio.

On the other side of the wood we came to some dilapidated-looking gates, with massive stone escutcheons on the great square pillars. There was a lodge, but it was evidently unoccupied, and Mr. Darrell's footman got down from the box to open the gates. Within we made the circuit of a neglected lawn, divided from a park by a sunk fence, across which some cattle stared at us in a lazy manner as we drove past them. The house was a long low building with heavily mullioned windows, and was flanked by gothic towers. Most of the windows had closed shutters, and the place had altogether a deserted look.

"The Priory has not been occupied for several years," Mr. Darrell said, as if in answer to my thoughts as I looked up at the closed windows. "The family have been too poor to live in it in anything like their old state. There is only one member of the old family remaining now, and he leads a wandering kind of life abroad, I believe."

"What has made them so poor?" asked Mrs. Darrell.

"Extravagant habits, I suppose," answered her husband, with an expressive shrug of the shoulders. "The Egertons have always been a wild race."

"Egerton!" Mrs. Darrell repeated; "I thought the name of these people was Cumber."

"No; Cumber is only the name of the place. It has been in the Egerton family for centuries."

"Indeed!"

I was seated exactly opposite her, and I was surprised by the strange startled look in her face as she repeated the name of Egerton. That look passed away in the next moment, and left her with her usual air of languid indifference; a placid kind of listlessness which harmonized very well with her pale complexion and delicate features. She was not a woman from whom one expected much animation.

The low iron-studded door of the Priory was opened by a decent-looking old woman of that species which seems created expressly for the showing of old houses. She divined our errand at once, and as soon as we were in the hall, began her catalogue of pictures and curiosities in the usual mechanical way, while we looked about us, always fixing our eyes on the wrong object, and more bewildered than enlightened by her description of the chief features of the place.

We went from room to room, the dame throwing open the shutters of the deep-set gothic windows, and letting in a flood of sunshine upon the faded tapestries and tarnished picture-frames. It was a noble old place, and the look of decay upon everything was more in accord with its grandeur than any modern splendor could have been.

We had been through all the rooms on the ground floor, most of which opened into one another, and were returning towards the hall, when Mr. Darrell missed his wife, and sent me back to look for her in one direction, while he went in another. I hurried through three or four empty rooms, until I came to a small one at the end of the house, and here I found her. I had not noticed this room much, for it was furnished in a more modern style than the rest of the house, and the old housekeeper had made very light of it, hurrying us back to look at some armor over the chimney-piece in the next room. It was

her master's study, she had said, and was not generally shown to strangers.

It was a small dark-looking room, lined with dingily-bound books upon heavy carved-oak shelves, and with no other furniture than a massive writing-table and three or four arm-chairs. Over the mantelpiece, which was modern and low, there was a portrait of a young man with a dark handsome face, and it was at this that Augusta Darrell was looking. I could see her face in profile as she stood upon the hearth with her clenched hand upon the mantelpiece, and I have never before seen such an expression in any human countenance.

What was it? Despair, remorse, regret? I know not; but it was a look of keenest anguish, of unutterable sorrow. The face was deadly pale, the great gray eyes looking upwards at the portrait, the lips locked together rigidly.

She did not hear my footstep; it was only when I spoke to her that she turned towards me with a stony face, and asked what I wanted.

I told her that Mr. Darrell had sent me.

"I was coming this instant," she said, resuming her usual manner with an effort. "I had only loitered to look at that portrait. A fine face, is it not, Miss Crofton?"

"A handsome one, at any rate," I answered doubtfully, for that dark haughty countenance struck me as rather repellant than attractive.

"That's as much as to say you don't think it a good face. Well, perhaps you are right. It reminded me of some one I knew a long time ago, and was rather interesting to me on that account. And then I fell into a kind of reverie, and forgot that my dear husband might miss me."

He came into the room as she was saying this. She told him that she had stopped to look at the portrait, and asked whose it was.

"It is a likeness of Angus Egerton, the present owner of the Priory," Mr. Darrell answered; "and a very good likeness, too —of as bad a man as ever lived, I believe," he added in a lower voice.

"A bad man?"

"Yes; he broke his mother's heart."

"In what manner?"

"He fell in love with a girl of low birth, whom he met in the course of a pedestrian tour in the West of England, and was going to marry her, I believe, when Mrs. Egerton got wind of the affair. She was a very proud woman—one of the most resolute masculine-minded women I ever knew. She went down into Devonshire, where the girl lived, immediately, and by some means or other prevented the marriage. How it was done I never heard; but it was not until a year afterwards that Angus Egerton discovered his mother's part in the business. He came down to the Priory suddenly and unexpectedly at a late hour one night, and walked straight to his mother's room. I have heard that old woman who has been showing us the house describe his ghastly face—she was Mrs. Egerton's maid in those days—as he pushed her aside and went into the room where his mother was sitting. There was a dreadful scene between them, and at the end of it Angus Egerton walked out of the house, swearing never again to enter it while his mother lived. He has kept his word. Mrs. Egerton never crossed the threshold after that night, and refused to see anybody except her servants and her doctor. She lived this lonely kind of life for nearly three years, and then died of some slow wasting disease, for which the doctors could find no name."

"And where did Mr. Egerton go after leaving her that night?"

"He slept at a little inn at Cumber, and went back to London next morning. He left England soon after that, and has lived abroad ever since."

"And you think him a very bad man?"

"I consider his conduct to his mother a sufficient evidence of that."

"He may have believed himself deeply wronged."

"He must have known that she had acted in his interests when she prevented his committing the folly of a low marriage.

She was his mother, and had been a most devoted and indulgent mother."

"And in the end contrived to break his heart—to say nothing of the girl who loved him, who was of course a piece of common clay, not worth consideration."

"I did not think you had so much romance, Augusta," said Mr. Darrell, laughing; "I suppose it is natural for a woman to take the part of unfortunate lovers, however foolish the affair may be. But I believe this Devonshire girl was quite unworthy of an honorable attachment on the part of any man. You see I knew and liked Mrs. Egerton, and I know how she loved her son. I cannot forgive him his conduct to her; nor have the reports of his life abroad been by any means favorable to his character. His career seems to have been a very wild and dissipated one."

"And he has never married?"

"No, he has never married."

"He has been true, at least," Mrs. Darrell said in a low thoughtful voice.

We had lingered in the little study while her husband had told his story. We went back to the hall now, and found Milly and Mr. Stormont looking rather listlessly at the old portraits of the Egerton race. I was anxious to see a picture of the last Mrs. Egerton, after what I had heard about her, and, at my request, the housekeeper showed me one in the drawing-room.

She was very handsome, and wonderfully like her son. I could fancy those two haughty spirits in opposition.

We spent another hour looking over the rest of the house—old tapestry, old pictures, old china, old furniture, secret staircases, carved chimney pieces, muniment chests, and the usual objects of interest to be found in such a place. After that we walked a little in the neglected garden, where there were old holly hedges that had grown high and wild for want of clipping, and where a curious old sun-dial had fallen down upon the grass in a forlorn way. The paths were all green and moss-grown, and the roses were almost choked with bindweed. I saw

Mrs. Darrell gather one of these roses and put it in her breast. It was the first time I had ever seen her pluck a flower, though there was a wealth of roses at Thornleigh.

So ended our visit to Cumber Priory; a place that was destined to be very memorable to some of us in the time to come.

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. THATCHER.

It had been Milly's habit to devote one day a week to visiting among the poor, before she went to Albury Lodge; and she now resumed this practice, I accompanying her upon her visits. I had been used to going about among the cottagers at home, and I liked the work. It was very pleasant to see Milly Darrell with these people—the perfect confidence and sympathy between them and her, the delight they seemed to take in her bright cheering presence. I was struck by their simple natural manner, and the absence of anything like sycophancy to be observed in them. One day, when we had been to several cottages about the village, Milly asked me if I could manage a rather long walk; and on my telling her that I could, we started upon a lonely road that wound across the moor in a direction I had never walked until that day. We went on for about two miles without passing a human habitation, and then came to one of the most desolate-looking cottages I ever remember seeing. It was little better than a cabin, and consisted only of two rooms —a kind of kitchen or dwelling-room, and a dark little bed-chamber opening out of it.

"I am not going to introduce you to a very agreeable person, Mary," Milly said, when we were within a few paces of this solitary dwelling; "but old Rebecca is a character in her way, and I make a point of coming to see her now and then, though she is not always very gracious to me."

It was a warm bright summer's day, but the door and the single window of the cottage were firmly closed. Milly knocked

with her hand, and a thin, feeble old voice called to her to "come in."

We went in: the atmosphere of the place was hot, and had an unpleasant doctor's-shoppish kind of odor, which I found was caused by some herbs in a jar that was simmering over a little stove in a corner. Bunches of dried herbs hung from the low ceiling, and on an old-fashioned lumbering chest of drawers that stood in the window there were more herbs and roots laid out to dry.

"Mrs. Thatcher is a very clever doctor, Mary," said Milly, as if by way of introduction; "all our servants come to her to be cured when they have colds and coughs.—And how are you this lovely summer weather, Mrs. Thatcher?"

"None too well, miss," grumbled the old woman; "I don't like the summer time; it never suited me."

"That's strange," said Milly, gaily; "I thought everybody liked summer."

"Not those that live as I do, Miss Darrell. There's no illness in summer—no colds, nor coughs, nor sore-throats, nor such-likes. I don't know that I shouldn't starve outright, if it wasn't for the ague; and even that is nothing now to what it used to be."

I was quite horror-struck by this ghoulish speech; but Milly only laughed gaily at the old woman's candor.

"If the doctors were as plain-spoken as you, I daresay they'd say pretty much the same kind of thing, Mrs. Thatcher," she said. "How's your grandson?"

"O, he's well enough, Miss Darrell. Naught's never in danger.—Peter, come here and see the young ladies."

A poor, feeble, pale-faced, semi-idiotic-looking boy came slowly out of the dark little bedroom, and stood grinning at us. He had the white sickly aspect of a creature reared without the influence of air and light; and I pitied him intensely as he stood there staring and grinning in that dreadful, hopeless manner.

"Poor Peter! He's no better, I'm afraid," said Milly, gently.

"No, miss, nor never will be. He knows more than people think, and has queer cunning ways of his own; but he'll never be any better or wiser than he is now."

"Not if you were to take as much pains with him as you do with the patients who pay you, Mrs. Thatcher?" asked Milly.

"I've taken pains with him," answered the woman, with a scowl. "I took to him kindly enough when he was a little fellow; but he's grown up to be nothing but a plague and a burden to me."

The boy left off grinning, and his poor weak chin sank lower on his narrow chest. His attitude had been a stooping one from the first; but he drooped visibly under the old woman's reproof.

"Can he employ himself in no way?"

"No, miss; except in picking the herbs and roots for me sometimes. He can do that, and he knows one from t'other."

"He's of some use to you, at any rate, then," said Milly.

"Little enough," the old woman answered sulkily. "I don't wan't help; I've plenty of time to gather them myself. But I've taught him to pick them, and it's the only thing he ever could learn."

"Poor fellow! He's your only grandchild, isn't he, Mrs. Thatcher?"

"Yes, he's the only one, miss, and he'd need be. I don't know how I should keep another. You can't remember my daughter Ruth? She was as pretty a girl as you'd care to see. She was housemaid at Cumber Priory in Mrs. Egerton's time, and she married the butler. They set up in business in a little public house in Thornleigh village, and he took to drinking, till everything went to rack and ruin. My poor girl took the trouble to heart more than her husband did, a great deal; and I believe it was the trouble that killed her. She died three weeks after that boy was born, and her husband ran away the day after her funeral, and has never been heard of since. Some say he drowned himself in the Clem; but he was a precious deal too fond of himself for that. He was up to his eyes in debt, and

didn't leave a sixpence behind him; that's how Peter came tc be thrown on my hands."

"Come here, Peter," said Milly, softly; and the boy went to her directly, and took the hand she offered him.

"You've not forgotten me, have you, Peter? Miss Darrell, who used to talk to you sometimes, a long time ago."

The boy's vacant face brightened into something like intelligence.

"I know you, miss," he said, "you was always kind to Peter. It's not many that I know; but I know you."

She took out her purse and gave him half-a-crown.

"There Peter, there's a big piece of silver for your own self, to buy whatever you like—sugar-sticks, gingerbread, marbles—anything."

His clumsy hand closed upon the coin, and I have no doubt he was pleased by the donation; but he never took his eyes from Milly Darrell's face. That bright, lovely face seemed to exercise a kind of fascination upon him.

"Don't you think Peter would be better if you were to give him a little more air and sunshine, Mrs. Thatcher?" Milly asked presently; "that bedroom seems rather a dark, close place."

"He needn't be there unless he likes," Mrs. Thatcher answered indifferently. "He sits out-of-doors whenever he chooses."

"Then I should always sit out-of-doors on fine days, if I were you, Peter," said Milly.

After this she talked a little to Mrs. Thatcher, who was by no means a sympathetic person, while I sat looking on, and contemplating the old woman with a feeling that was the reverse of admiration.

She was of a short squat figure, with broad shoulders and no throat to speak of, and her head seemed too big for her body. Here face was long and thin, with large features, and a frame of scanty gray hair, among which a sandy tinge still lingered here and there; her eyes were of an ugly reddish-brown, and had, I

thought, a most sinister expression. I must have been very ill, and sorely at a loss for a doctor, before I could have been induced to trust my health to the care of Mrs. Rebecca Thatcher.

I told Milly as much while we were walking homewards, and she admitted that Rebecca Thatcher was no favorite even among the country people, who believed implicitly in her skill.

"I am afraid she tells fortunes, and dabbles in all sorts of superstitious tricks," Milly added gravely; "but she is so artful, there is no way of finding her out in that kind of business. The foolish country girls who consult her always keep her secret, and she manages to put on a fair face before our rector and his curate, who believe her to be a very respectable woman."

The days and weeks slipped by very pleasantly at Thornleigh, and the end of those bright midsummer holidays came only too soon. It seemed a bitter thing to say "good-bye" to Milly Darrell, and to go back alone to a place which must needs be doubly dull and dreary to me without her. She had been my only friend at Albury Lodge; loving her as I did, I had never cared to form any other friendship.

The dreaded day came at last—dreaded I know by both of us; and I said "good-bye" to my darling so quietly, that I am sure none could have guessed the grief I felt in this parting. Mrs. Darrell was very kind and gracious on this occasion, begging that I would come back to Thornleigh at Christmas—if they should happen to spend their Christmas there.

Milly looked up at her wonderingly as she said this.

"Is there any chance of our spending it elsewhere, Augusta?" she asked.

Mrs. Darrell had persuaded her stepdaughter to use this familiar Christian name, rather than the more formal mode of address.

"I don't know, my dear. Your papa has sometimes talked of a house in town, or we might be abroad. I can only say that if we are at home here, we shall be very much pleased to see Miss Crofton again."

I thanked her, kissed Milly once more, and so departed—to be driven to the station in state in the barouche, and to look sadly back at the noble old house in which I had been so happy.

Once more I returned to the dryasdust routine of Albury Lodge, and rang the changes upon history and geography, chronology and English grammar, physical science and the elements of botany, until my weary head ached and my heart grew sick. And when I came to be a governess, it would of course be the same thing over and over again, on a smaller scale. And this was to be my future, without hope of change or respite, until I grew an old woman worn-out with the drudgery of tuition!

CHAPTER V.

MILLY'S LETTER.

THE half-year wore itself slowly away. There were no incidents to mark the time, no change except the slow changes of the seasons; and my only pleasures were letters from home or from Emily Darrell.

Of the home letters I will not speak—they could have no interest except for myself; but Milly's are links in the story of a life. She wrote to me as freely as she had talked to me, pouring out all her thoughts and fancies with that confiding frankness which was one of the most charming attributes of her mind. For some time the letters contained nothing that could be called news; but late in September there came one which seemed to me to convey intelligence of some importance.

"You will be grieved to hear, my darling Mary," she wrote, after a little playful discussion of my own affairs, "that my stepmother and I are no nearer anything like a real friendship than we were when you left us. What it is that makes the gulf between us I cannot tell; but there is something, some hidden feeling in both our minds, I think, which prevents our growing fond of each other. She is very kind to me, so far as perfect non-interference with my doings, and a gracious manner when

we are together, can go; but I am sure she does not like me. I have surprised her more than once looking at me with the strangest expression—a calculating, intensely thoughtful look, that made her face ten years older than it is at other times. Of course there are times when we are thrown together alone—though this does not occur often, for she and my father are a most devoted couple, and spend the greater part of every day together—and I have noticed at those times that she never speaks of her girlhood, or of any part of her life before her marriage. All that came before seems a blank page, or a sealed volume that she does not care to open. I asked some trifling questions about her father once, and she turned upon me almost angrily.

"'I do not care to speak about him, Milly,' she said; 'he was not a good father, and he is best forgotten. I never had a real friend till I met my husband.'

"There is one part of her character which I am bound to appreciate. I believe that she is really grateful and devoted to papa, and he certainly seems thoroughly happy in her society. The marriage had the effect, which I felt sure it must have—it has divided us two most completely; but if it has made him happy, I have no reason to complain. What could I wish for beyond his happiness?

"And now, Mary, for my news. Julian Stormont has been here, and has asked me to be his wife.

"He came over last Saturday afternoon, intending to stop with us till Monday morning. It was a bright warm day here, and in the afternoon he persuaded me to walk to Cumber Church with him. You remember the way we drove through the wood the day we went to the Priory, I daresay; but there is a nearer way than that for foot passengers, and I think a prettier one—a kind of cross-cut through the same wood. I consented willingly enough, having nothing better to do with myself, and we had a pleasant walk to church, talking of all kinds of things. As we returned Julian grew very serious, and when we were about half way upon our journey, he asked me if I could guess what had brought him over to Thornleigh. Of course I told

him that I concluded he had come as he usually did—for rest and change after the cares of business, and to talk about business affairs with papa.

"He told me he had come for something more than that. He came to tell me that he had loved me all his life; that there was nothing my father would like better than our union if it could secure my happiness, as he hoped and believed it might.

"I think you know, Mary, that no idea of this kind had ever entered my mind. I told Julian this, and told him that, however I might esteem him as my cousin, he could never be nearer or dearer to me than that. The change in his face when he heard this almost frightened me. He grew deadly pale, but I am certain it was anger rather than disappointment that was uppermost in his mind. I never knew until then what a hard cruel face it could be.

"'Is this irrevocable, Emily?' he asked, in a cold firm voice; "'is there no hope that you will change your mind by and by?"

"'No, Julian; I am never likely to do that.'

"'There is some one else, then, I suppose,' he said.

"'No, indeed, there is no one else.'

"'Highly complimentary to me!' he cried, with a harsh laugh.

"I was very sorry for him, in spite of that angry look.

"'Pray don't imagine that I do not appreciate your many high qualities, Julian,' I said, 'or that I do not feel honored by your preference for me. No doubt there are many women in the world better deserving your regard than I am, who would be able to return it.'

"'Thank you for that little conventional speech,' he cried, with a sneer. 'A man builds all his hopes of happiness on one woman, and she coolly shatters the fabric of his life, and then tells him to go and build elsewhere. I daresay there are women in the world who would condescend to marry me if I asked them, but it is my misfortune to care only for one woman.

I can't transfer my affection, as a man transfers his capital from one form of investment to another.'

"We walked on for some time in silence. I was determined not to be angry with him, however ungraciously he might speak to me; and when we were drawing near home, I begged that we might remain friends still, and that this unfortunate conversation might make no difference between us. I told him I knew how much my father valued him, and that it would distress me deeply if he deserted Thornleigh on my account.

"'Friends!' he replied in an absent tone; 'yes, we are still friends, of course, and I shall not desert Thornleigh.'

"He seemed gayer than usual that evening after dinner. Whether the gaiety was assumed in order to hide his depression, or whether he was really able to take the matter lightly, I cannot tell. Of course I cannot shut out of my mind the consideration that a marriage with me would be a matter of great worldly advantage to Julian, who has nothing but the salary he receives from my father, and who by such a marriage would most likely secure immediate possession of the business, in which he is already a kind of deputy principal.

"I noticed that my stepmother was especially kind to Julian this evening, and that she and he sat apart in one of the windows for some time talking to each other in a low confidential tone, while my father took his after-dinner nap. I wonder whether he told her of our interview that afternoon?

"He went back to Shields early next morning, and bade me good-bye quite in his usual manner; so I hoped he had forgiven me; but the affair left an unpleasant feeling in my mind, a sort of vague dread of some trouble to arise out of it in the future. I cannot forget that hard cruel look in my cousin's face.

"When he was gone, Mrs. Darrell began to praise him very warmly, and my father spoke of him in the same tone. They talked of him a good deal as we lingered over our breakfast, and I fancied there was some intention with regard to me in the minds of both—they seem indeed to think alike on every sub-

ject. Dearly as I love my father, this is a point upon which even his influence could not affect me. I might be weak and yielding upon every other question, never upon this.

"And now let me tell you about my friend Peter, Rebecca Thatcher's half-witted grandson. You know how painfully we were both struck by the poor fellow's listless hopeless manner when we were at the cottage on the moor? I thought of it a great deal afterwards, and it occurred to me that our head-gardener might find work for him in the way of weeding, and rolling the gravel paths, and such humble matters. Brook is a good kind old man, and always ready to do anything to please me; so I asked him the question one day in August, and he promised that when he next wanted extra hands Peter Thatcher should be employed, 'Though I don't suppose I shall ever make much of him, miss,' he said; 'but there's naught I wouldn't do to please you.'

"Well, my dear Mary, the boy came, and has done so well as quite to surprise Brook and the other two gardeners. He has an extraordinary attachment to me, and nothing delights him so much as to wait upon me when I am attending to my ferns, a task I always perform myself, as you know. To see this poor boy, standing by with a watering-pot in one hand, and a little basket of dead leaves in the other, watching me as breathlessly as if I were some great surgeon operating upon a patient, would make you smile; but I think you could scarcely fail to be touched by his devotion. He tells me that he is so happy at Thornleigh, and he begins to look a great deal brighter already. The men say he is indefatigable in his work, and worth two ordinary boys. He is passionately fond of flowers, and I have begun to teach him the elements of botany. It is rather slow work impressing the names of the plants upon his poor feeble brain; but he is so anxious to learn, and so proud of being taught, that I am well repaid for my trouble."

Milly was very anxious that I should spend Christmas at Thornleigh; but it was by that time nearly a year since I had seen the dear ones at home, and ill as my dear father could

afford any addition to his expenses, he wished me to spend my holidays with him; and so it was arranged that I should return to Warwickshire, much to my dear girl's regret.

The holiday was a very happy one; and, before it was over, I received a letter from Milly, telling me that Mr. and Mrs. Darrell were going abroad for some months, and asking me to cut short my term at Albury Lodge, and come to Thornleigh as her companion, at a salary which I thought a very handsome one.

The idea of exchanging the dull monotony of Miss Bagshot's establishment for such a home as Thornleigh, with the friend I loved as dearly as a sister, was more than delightful to me, to say nothing of a salary which would enable me to buy my own clothes and leave a margin for an annual remittance to my father. I talked the subject over with him, and he wrote immediately to Miss Bagshot, requesting her to waive the half-year's notice of the withdrawal of my services, to which she was fairly entitled. This she consented very kindly to do: and instead of going back to Albury Lodge, I went to Thornleigh.

Mr. and Mrs. Darrell had started for Paris when I arrived, and the house seemed very empty and quiet. My dear girl came into the hall to receive me, and led me off to her pretty sitting-room, where there was a bright fire, and where, she told me, she spent almost the whole of her time now.

"And are you really pleased to come to me, Mary?" she asked, when our first greetings were over.

"More than pleased, my darling. It seems almost too bright a life for me. I can hardly believe in it yet."

"But perhaps you will soon get as tired of Thornleigh as ever you did of Albury Lodge. It will be rather a dull kind of life, you know; only you and I and the old servants."

"I shall never feel dull with you, Milly. But tell me how all this came about. How was it you didn't go abroad with Mr. and Mrs. Darrell?"

"Ah, that is rather strange, isn't it? The truth of the matter is, that Augusta did not want me to go with them. She

does not like me, Mary, that is the real truth, though she affects to be very fond of me, and has contrived to make my father think she is so. What is there that she cannot make him think? She does not like me; and she is never quite happy or at her ease when I am with her. She had been growing tired of Thornleigh for some time when the winter began; and she looked so pale and ill, that my father got anxious about her. The doctor here treated her in the usual stereotyped way, and made very light of her ailments, but recommended change of air and scene. Papa proposed going to Scarborough; but somehow or other Augusta contrived to change Scarborough into Paris, and they are to spend the winter and spring there, and perhaps go on to Germany in the summer. At first papa was very anxious to take me with them; but Augusta dropped some little hints—it would interrupt my studies, and unsettle me, and so on. You know I am rather proud, Mary, so you can imagine I was not slow to understand her. I said I would much prefer to stay at Thornleigh, and proposed immediately that you should come to me and be my companion, and help me on with my studies."

"My dearest, how good of you to wish that!"

"It was not at all good. I think you are the only person in the world who really cares for me, now that I have lost papa—for I have lost him you see, Mary; that becomes more obvious every day. Well, dear, I had a hard battle to fight. Mrs. Darrell said you were absurdly young for such a position, and that I required a matronly person, able to direct and protect me, and take the management of the house in her absence, and so on; but I said that I wanted neither direction nor protection; that the house wanted no other management than that of Mrs. Bunce the housekeeper, who has managed it ever since I was a baby; and that if I could not have Mary Crofton, I would have no one at all. I told papa what an indefatigable darling you were, and how conscientiously you would perform anything you promised to do. So, after a good deal of discussion, the matter was settled; and here we are, with the house

all to ourselves, and the prospect of being alone together for six months to come."

I asked her if she had seen much of Mr. Stormont since that memorable Sunday afternoon.

"He has been here twice," she said, "for his usual short visit from Saturday afternoon till Monday morning, and he has treated me just as if that uncomfortable interview had never taken place."

We were very happy together in the great lonely house, amongst old servants, who seemed to take a pleasure in waiting on us. We spent our mornings and evenings in Milly's sitting-room, and took our meals in a snug prettily-furnished breakfast-room on the ground-floor. We read together a great deal, going through a systematic course of study of a very different kind from the dry labors of Albury Lodge. There was a fine old library at Thornleigh, and we read the masters of English and French prose together, with unflagging interest and pleasure. Besides all this, Milly worked hard at her music, and still harder at her painting, which was a real delight to her.

Mr. Collingwood the rector, and his family, came to see us, and insisted on our visiting them frequently in a pleasant unceremonious manner; and we had other invitations from Milly's old friends in the neighborhood of Thornleigh.

There were carriages at our disposal, but we did not often use them. Milly preferred walking; and we used to take long rambles together whenever the weather was favorable—rambles across the moor, or far away over the hills, or deep into the wood between Thornleigh and Cumber.

CHAPTER VI.

A NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

It was shortly after my arrival at Thornleigh that I first saw the man whose story I had heard in the study at Cumber Priory. Milly and I had been together about a fortnight, and it was the end of January—cold, clear, bright weather—

when we set out early one afternoon for a ramble in our favorite wood, Milly furnished with pencils and sketch-book, in order to jot down any striking effect of the gaunt leafless old trees. She had a hardy disregard of cold in her devotion to her art, and would sit down to sketch in the bitter January weather in spite of my entreaties.

We stayed out longer than usual, and Milly had stopped once or twice to make a hasty sketch when the sky grew suddenly dark, and big drops of rain began to fall slowly. These were speedily succeeded by a pelting storm of rain and hail, and we felt that we were caught, and must be drenched to the skin before we could get back to Thornleigh. The weather had been temptingly fine when we left home, and we had neither umbrellas nor any other kind of protection against the rain.

"We had better scamper off as fast as we can," said Milly.

"But we can't run four miles. Hadn't we better go on to Cumber, and wait in the village till the weather changes, or try to get some kind of conveyance there?"

"Well, I suppose that would be best. There must be such a thing as a fly at Cumber, I should think, small as the place is. But it's nearly a mile from here to the village."

"Anything seems better than going back through the wood in such weather," I said.

We were close to the outskirts of the wood at this time, and within a very short distance of the Priory gates. While we were still pausing in an undecided way, with the rain pelting down upon us, a figure came towards us from among the leafless trees—the figure of a man, a gentleman, as we could see by his dress and bearing, and a stranger. We had never met any one but country-people, farm-laborers, and so on, in the wood before, and were a little startled by this apparition.

He came up to us quickly, lifting his hat as he approached us.

"Caught in the storm, ladies," he said, "and without umbrellas I see, too. Have you far to go?"

"Yes, we have to go as far as Thornleigh," Milly answered.

"Quite impossible in such weather. Will you come into the Priory and wait till the storm is over?"

"The Priory! To be sure!" cried Milly. "I never thought of that. I know the housekeeper very well, and I am sure she would let us stop there."

We walked towards the Priory gates, the stranger accompanying us. I had no opportunity of looking at him under that pelting rain, but I was wondering all the time who he was, and how he came to speak of Cumber Priory in that familiar tone.

One of the gates stood open, and we went in.

"A desolate-looking place, isn't it?" said the stranger. "Dismal enough, without the embellishment of such weather as this."

He led the way to the hall-door, and opened it unceremoniously, standing aside for us to pass in before him. There was a fire burning in the wide old-fashioned fireplace, and the place had an air of occupation that was new to it.

"I'll send for Mrs. Mills, and she shall take your wet shawls away to be dried," said the stranger, ringing a bell; and I think we both began to understand by this time that he must be the master of the house.

"You are very kind," Milly answered, taking off her dripping shawl. "I did not know that the Priory was occupied except by the old servants. I fear you must have thought me very impertinent just now when I talked so coolly of taking shelter here."

"I am only too glad that you should find refuge in the old place."

He wheeled a couple of ponderous carved-oak chairs close to the hearth, and begged us to sit there; but Milly preferred standing in the noble old gothic window looking out at the rain.

"They will be getting anxious about us at home," she said, "if we are not back before dark."

"I wish I possessed a close carriage to place at your service. I do, indeed, boast of the ownership of a dog-cart, if you would not be afraid of driving in such a barbarous vehicle when the rain is over. It would keep you out of the mud at any rate."

Milly laughed gaily.

"I have been brought up in the country," she said, "and am not afraid at all of driving in a dog-cart. I used often to go out with papa in his, before he married."

"Then, when the storm is over, I shall have the pleasure of driving you to Thornleigh, if you will permit me that honor."

Milly looked a little perplexed at this, and made some excuse about not wishing to cause so much trouble.

"I really think we could walk home very well; don't you, Mary?" she said; and I declared myself quite equal to the walk.

"It would be impossible for you to get back to Thornleigh before dark," the gentleman remonstrated. "I shall be quite offended if you refuse the use of my dog-cart, and insist on getting wet feet. I dare say your feet are wet as it is, by the bye."

We assured him of the thickness of our boots, and gave our shawls to Mrs. Mills, the old housekeeper, who carried them off to be dried in the kitchen, and promised to convey the order about the dog-cart to the stables immediately.

I had time now to look at our new acquaintance, who was standing with his shoulders against one angle of the high oak mantelpiece, watching the rain beating against a window opposite to him. I had no difficulty in recognizing the original of that portrait which Augusta Darrell had looked at so strangely. He was much older than when the portrait had been taken—ten years at the least, I thought. In the picture he looked little more than twenty, and I should have guessed him now to be on the wrong side of thirty.

He was handsome still, but the dark powerful face had a sort of rugged look, the heavy eyebrows overshadowed the sombre black eyes, a thick fierce-looking moustache shrouded the mouth, but could not quite conceal an expression, half

cynical, half melancholy, that lurked about the lower corners of the full firm lips. He looked like a man whose past life held some sad or sinful history.

I could fancy, as I looked at him, the last bitter interview with his mother, and I could imagine how hard and cruel such a man might be under the influence of an unpardonable wrong. Like Mrs. Darrell, I was inclined to place myself on the side of the unfortunate lovers, rather than on that of the mother, who had been willing to sacrifice her son's happiness to her pride of race.

We all three remained silent for some little time, Milly and I standing together in the window, Mr. Egerton leaning against the mantelpiece, watching the rain with an absent look in his face. He roused himself at last, as with an effort, and came over to the window by which we stood.

"It looks rather hopeless at present," he said; "but I shall spin you over to Thornleigh in no time; so you mustn't be anxious. It is at Thornleigh Manor you live, is it not?"

"Yes," Milly answered. "My name is Darrell, and this young lady is Miss Crofton, my very dear friend."

He bowed in recognition of this introduction.

"I thought as much—I mean as to your name being Darrell. I had the honor to know Mr. Darrell very well when I was a lad, and I have a vague recollection of a small child in a white frock, who, I think, must have been yourself. I have only been home a week, or I should have done myself the pleasure of calling on your father."

"Papa is in Paris," Milly answered, "with my stepmother."

"Ah, he has married again, I hear. One of the many changes that have come to pass since I was last in Yorkshire."

"Have you returned for good, Mr. Egerton?"

"For good—or for evil—who knows?" he answered, with a careless laugh. "As to whether I stay here so many weeks or so many years, that is a matter of supreme uncertainty. I never am in the same mind very long together. But I am heartily sick of knocking about abroad, and I cannot possibly

find life emptier or duller here than I have found it in places that people call gay."

"I can't fancy any one growing tired of such a place as the Priory," said Milly.

"'Stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage.' 'Tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus.' Cannot you fancy a man getting utterly tired of himself and his own thoughts—knowing himself by heart, and finding the lesson a dreary one? Perhaps not. A girl's life seems all brightness. What should such happy young creatures know of that arid waste of years that lies beyond a man's thirtieth birthday, when his youth has not been a fortunate one? Ah, there is a break in the sky yonder; the rain will be over presently."

The rain did cease, as he had prophesied. The dog-cart was brought round to the door by a clumsy-looking man in corduroy, who seemed half groom, half gardener; and Mr. Egerton drove us home; Milly sitting next him, I at the back. His horse was a very good one, and the drive only lasted a quarter of an hour, during which time our new acquaintance talked very pleasantly to both of us.

I could not forget that Mr. Darrell had called him a bad man; but in spite of that sweeping condemnation I could not bring myself to think of him without a certain interest.

Of course Milly and I discussed Mr. Egerton as we sat over our snug little *tête-à-tête* dinner, and we were both inclined to speak of his blighted life in a pitying kind of way, and to blame his mother's conduct, little as we knew of the details of the story. Our existence was so quiet that this little incident made quite an event, and we were apt to date things from that afternoon for some time afterwards.

CHAPTER VII.

A LITTLE MATCH-MAKING.

We heard nothing of Mr. Egerton for about three weeks, at the end of which time we were invited to dine at the Rectory. The

first person we saw on going into the long, low, old-fashioned drawing-room, was the master of Cumber Priory leaning against the mantelpiece in his favorite attitude. The Rector was not in the room when we arrived, and Angus Egerton was talking to Mrs. Collingwood, who sat in a low chair near the fire.

"Mr. Egerton has been telling me about your adventure in the wood, Milly," Mrs. Collingwood said, as she rose to receive us. "I hope it will be a warning to you to be more careful in future. I think that Cumber Wood is altogether too dangerous a place for two young ladies like you and Miss Crofton."

"The safest place in the world," cried Angus Egerton. "I shall always be at hand to come to the ladies' assistance, and shall pray for the timely appearance of an infuriated bull, in order that I may distinguish myself by something novel in the way of a rescue. I hear that you are a very charming artist, Miss Darrell, and that you have done some of our oaks and beeches the honor to immortalize them."

There is no need for me to record all the airy empty talk of that evening. It was a very pleasant evening. Angus Egerton had received his first lessons in the classics from the kind old Rector, and had been almost a son of the house in the past, the girls told me. He had resumed his old place upon his return, and seemed really fond of these friends, whom he had found ready to welcome him warmly, in spite of all rumors to his disadvantage that had floated to Thornleigh during the years of his absence.

He was very clever, and seemed to have been everywhere, and to have seen everything worth seeing that the world contained. He had read a great deal too, in spite of his wandering life; and the fruit of his reading cropped up pleasantly now and then in his conversation.

There were no other guests, except an old country squire, who talked of nothing but his farming. Milly sat next Angus Egerton; and from my place on the other side of the table I could see how much she was interested in his talk. He did not stop long in the dining-room after we had left, but joined us as

we sat round the fire in the drawing-room, talking over the poor people with Mrs. Collingwood and her two daughters, who were great authorities upon the question, and held a Dorcas society once a week, of which Milly and I were members.

There was the usual music—a little playing and a little singing from the younger ladies of the company, myself included. Milly sang an English ballad very sweetly, and Angus Egerton stood by the piano looking down at her while she sang.

Did he fall in love with her upon this first happy evening that these two spent together? I cannot tell; but it is certain that after that evening he seemed to haunt us in our walks, and, go where we would, we were always meeting him, in company with a Scottish deerhound called Nestor, of which Milly became very fond. When we met in this half-accidental way, he used to join us in our walk for a mile or two, very often bearing us company till we were within a few paces of Thornleigh.

These meetings, utterly accidental as they always were on our side, were a source of some perplexity to me. I was not quite certain whether I was right in sanctioning so close an acquaintance between Emily Darrell and the master of Cumber Priory. I knew that her father thought badly of him. Yet, what could I do? I was not old enough to pretend to any authority over my darling, nor had her father invested me with any; and I knew that her noble nature was worthy of all confidence. Beyond this, I liked Angus Egerton, and was inclined to trust him. So the time slipped away very pleasantly for all of us, and the friendship among us all three became closer day by day.

We met Mr. Egerton very often at the Rectory, and sometimes at other houses where we visited. He was much liked by the Thornleigh people, who had, most of them, known him in his boyhood; and it was considered by his old friends, that, whatever his career abroad might have been, he had begun, and was steadily pursuing, a reformed course of life. His means did not enable him to do much, but he was doing a little towards the improvement of Cumber Priory; and his existence there was as simple as that of the Master of Ravenswood.

I had noticed that Mrs. Collingwood did all in her power to encourage the friendship between Milly and Mr. Egerton, and one day in the spring, after they had met a great many times at her house, she spoke to me of her hopes quite openly.

It was a bright afternoon, and we were all strolling in the garden, after a game of croquet—the Rector's wife and I side by side, Milly and Angus a little way in front of us.

"I think she likes him," Mrs. Collingwood said thoughtfully.

"Everybody seems to like Mr. Egerton," I answered.

"O yes, I know that; but I mean something more than the ordinary liking. I am so anxious that he should marry—and marry wisely. I think I am almost as fond of him as if he were my son; and I should be so pleased if I could be the means of bringing about a match between them. Milly is just the girl to make a man happy, and her fortune would restore Cumber Priory to all its glory."

Her fortune! The word jarred upon me. Was it her money, after all, that Angus Egerton was thinking of when he took such pains to pursue my darling?

"I should be sorry for her to marry any one who cared for her money," I said.

"Of course, my dear Miss Crofton; and so should I be sorry to see her throw herself away upon any one with whom her money was a paramount consideration. But one cannot put these things quite out of the question. I know that Angus admired her very much the first day he saw her, and I fancy his admiration has grown into a warmer feeling since then. He has said nothing to me upon the subject, nor I to him; for you know how silent he always is about himself. But I cannot help wishing that such a thing might come to pass. He has one of the best names in the North Riding, and a first-rate position as the owner of Cumber Priory. He only wants money."

I was too young and inexperienced to take a worldly view of things, and from this moment felt disposed to distrust Mr.

Egerton. I remembered the story of his early attachment, and told myself that a man who had loved once like that had in all probability worn out his powers of loving.

"I don't think Mr. Darrell would approve of, or even permit, such a marriage," I said presently. "I know he has a very bad opinion of Mr. Egerton."

"On what account?"

"On account of his conduct to his mother."

"No one knows the secret of that affair except Angus himself," answered Mrs. Collingwood. "I don't think any one has a right to think badly of him upon that ground. I knew Mrs. Egerton very well. She was a proud hard woman, capable of almost anything in order to accomplish any set purpose of her own. Up to the time when he went to Oxford, Angus had been an excellent son."

"Was it at Oxford he met the girl he wanted to marry?"

"No; it was somewhere in the west of England, where he went on a walking tour during the long vacation."

"He must have loved her very much, to act as he did. I should doubt his power ever to love any one else."

"That is quite a girl's way of thinking, my dear Miss Crofton. Depend upon it, after that kind of stormy first love, there generally comes a better and truer feeling. Angus was little more than a boy then. He is in the prime of manhood now, able to judge wisely, and not easily to be caught, or he would have married in all those years abroad."

This seemed reasonable enough: but I was vexed, nevertheless, by Mrs. Collingwood's match-making notions, which seemed to disturb the peaceful progress of our lives. After this I looked upon every invitation to the Rectory—where we never went without meeting Mr. Egerton—as a kind of snare; but our visits there were always very pleasant, and I grew in time to think with more indulgence of the Rector's wife's desire for her favorite's advantage.

In all this time, Angus Egerton had in no manner betrayed the state of his feelings. If he met us in our walks oftener

than seemed possible by mere chance, there was nothing strictly lover-like in his tone or conduct. But I have seen his face light up as he met my dear girl at these times, and I have noticed a certain softening of his voice as he talked to her, that I never heard on other occasions.

And she? About her feelings I had much less doubt. She tried her uttermost to hide the truth from me, ashamed of her regard for one who had never yet professed to be more than a friend; but I knew that she loved him. It was impossible, in the perfect companionship and confidence of our lives, for Milly to keep this first secret of her pure young heart hidden from me. I knew that she loved him; and I began to look forward anxiously to Mr. Darrell's return, which would relieve me of all responsibility, and perhaps put an end to our friendship with Angus Egerton.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE WATCH.

THE travellers came back to Thornleigh Manor in August, when the days were breathless and sultry, and the freshness of the foliage had already begun to fade after an unusually dry summer. Milly and I had been very happy together, and I think we both looked forward with a vague dread to the coming break in our lives. She loved her father as dearly as she had ever done, and longed ardently to see him again; but she knew as well as I did that our independence must end with his return.

"If he were coming back alone, Mary," she said—"if that marriage were all a dream, and he were coming back alone—how happy I should be! I know that of his own free will he would never come between me and any wish of mine. But I don't know how he would act under his wife's influence. You cannot imagine the power she has over him. And we shall have to begin the old false life over again, she and I—disliking and distrusting each other in our hearts—the daily round of civilities

and ceremonies and pretences. O Mary, you cannot think how I hate it."

We had seen nothing of Julian Stormont during all the time of our happy solitude; but on the day appointed for Mr. and Mrs. Darrell's return he came to Thornleigh, looking more careworn than ever. I pitied him a little, knowing the state of his feelings about Milly, believing indeed that he loved her with a rare intensity, and being inclined to attribute the change in him to his disappointment upon this subject.

Milly told him how ill he was looking, and he said something about hard work and late hours, with a little bitter laugh.

"It doesn't matter to any one whether I am well or ill, you see, Milly," he said. "What would any one care if I were to drop over the side of the quay some dark night, on my way from the office to my lodgings after a hard day's work, and never be seen alive again?"

"How wicked it is of you to talk like that, Julian! There are plenty of people who would care—papa, to begin with."

"Well I suppose my uncle William would be rather sorry. He would lose a good man of business, and he would scarcely like going back to the counting-house, and giving himself up to all the dry details of commerce once more."

The travellers arrived soon after this. Mr. Darrell greeted his daughter with much tenderness; but I noticed a kind of languor in Mrs. Darrell's embrace, very different from her reception of Milly at that first meeting which I had witnessed more than a year before. It seemed to me that her power over her husband was now supreme, and that she did not trouble herself to keep up any pretence of affection for his only child.

She was dressed to perfection; and that subdued charm which was scarcely beauty, and yet stood in place of it, attracted me to-day as it had done when we first met. She was a woman who, I could imagine, might be more admired than many handsomer women. There was a distinction, an originality about the pale delicate face, dark arched brows, and gray eyes—eyes which were at times very brilliant.

She looked around her without the faintest show of interest or admiration as she loitered with her husband on the terrace, while innumerable travelling-bags, shawls, books, newspapers, and packages were being carried from the barouche to the house.

"How dry and burnt-up everything looks!" she said.

"Have you no better greeting than that for Thornleigh, my dear Augusta?" Mr. Darrell asked in rather a wounded tone. "I thought you would be pleased to see the old place again."

"Thornleigh Manor is not a passion of mine," she answered. "I hope you will take a house in town at the beginning of next year."

She passed on into the hall, after having honored me with the coldest possible shake-hands. We saw no more of her until nearly dinner-time, when she came down to the drawing-room, dressed in white, and looking deliciously pale and cool in the sultry weather. Milly had spent the afternoon in going round the gardens and home-farm with her father, and had thoroughly enjoyed the delight of a couple of hours alone with him. She gave him up now to Mrs. Darrell, who devoted all her attention to him for the rest of the evening; while Julian Stormont, Milly, and I loitered about the garden, and played a desultory game of croquet.

It was not until the next morning that Mr. Egerton's name was mentioned, although it had been in my thoughts, and I cannot doubt in Milly's, ever since Mr. Darrell's arrival. We were in the drawing-room after breakfast, not quite decided what to do with the day, when Mr. Darrell came into the room dressed for a ride with his wife. He went over to the window by which Milly was standing.

"You have quite given up riding, Ellis tells me, my dear," he said.

"I have not cared to ride while you were away, papa, as Mary does not ride."

"Miss Crofton might have learned to ride; there would always be a horse at her disposal."

"We like walking better," Milly said, blushing a little, and

fidgeting nervously with one of the buttons on her father's coat. "I used to feel in the way, you know, when I rode with you and Mrs. Darrell."

"That was your own fault, Milly," he answered, with a displeased look.

"I suppose it was. But I think Augusta felt it too. O, by the bye, papa, I did not tell you quite all the news when we were out together yesterday."

"Indeed!"

"No; I forgot to mention that Mr. Egerton has come back."

"Angus Egerton?"

"Yes; he came back last winter."

"You never said so in your letters."

"Didn't I? I suppose that was because I knew you were rather prejudiced against him; and one can't explain away that kind of thing in a letter."

"You would find it very difficult to explain away my dislike of Angus Egerton, either in or out of a letter. Have you seen much of him?"

"A good deal. He has been at the Rectory very often when Mary and I have been invited there. The Collingwoods are very fond of him. I am sure—I think—you will like him, papa, when you come to see a little of him. He is going to call upon you."

"He can come if he pleases," Mr. Darrell answered, with an indifferent air; "I shall not be uncivil to him. But I am rather sorry that he has made such a favorable impression upon you Milly."

She was still playing with the buttons of his coat, looking downward, her dark eyes quite veiled by their long lashes.

"I did not say that, papa," she murmured shyly.

"But I am sure of it from your manner. Has he done anything towards the improvement of Cumber?"

"O yes; he has put new roofs to some part of the stables; and the land is in better order, they say; and the gardens are kept nicely now."

"Does he live alone at the Priory?"

"Quite alone, papa."

"He must find it rather a dull business, I should think."

"Mr. Collingwood said he is very fond of study, and that he has a wonderful collection of old books. He is a great smoker too, I believe; he walks a good deal; and he hunted all last winter. They say he is a tremendous rider."

Augusta Darrell came in at this moment, ready for her ride. Her slim willowy figure looked to great advantage in the plain tight-fitting cloth habit; and the little felt hat with its bright scarlet feather gave a coquettish expression to her face. She tapped her husband lightly on the arm with her riding-whip.

"Now, William, if you are quite ready."

"My dearest, I have been waiting for the last half-hour."

They went off to their horses. Milly followed them to the terrace, and watched them as they rode away.

We spent the morning out-of-doors sketching, with Julian Stormont in attendance upon us. At two o'clock we all met at luncheon.

After luncheon Milly and I went to the drawing-room, while Mrs. Darrell and Mr. Stormont strolled out upon the terrace. My dear girl had a sort of restless manner to-day, and went from one occupation to another, now sitting for a few minutes at the piano, playing brief snatches of pensive melody, now taking up a book, only to throw it down again with a little weary sigh. She seated herself at a table presently, and began to arrange the sketches in her portfolio. While she was doing this, a servant announced Mr. Egerton. She rose hurriedly, blushing as I had rarely seen her blush before, and looking towards the open window near her, almost as if she would have liked to make her escape from the room. It was the first time Angus Egerton had been at Thornleigh Manor since she was a little child.

"Tell papa that Mr. Egerton is here, Filby," she said to the servant. "I think you will find him in the library."

She had recovered her self-possession in some measure by the

time she came forward to shake hands with the visitor; and in a few minutes we were talking in the usual easy friendly way

"You see, I have lost no time in calling upon your papa, Miss Darrell," he said presently. "I am not too proud to show him how anxious I am to regain his friendship, if indeed, I ever possessed it."

Mr. Darrell came into the room as he was speaking, and however coldly he might have intended to receive the master of Cumber Priory, his manner soon softened and grew more cordial. There was a certain kind of charm about Angus Egerton, not very easily to be described, which I think had a potent influence upon all who knew him.

I fancied that Mr. Darrell felt this, and struggled against it, and ended by giving way to it. I saw that he watched his daughter closely, even anxiously, when she was talking to Angus Egerton, as if he had already some suspicion about the state of her feelings with regard to him. Mr. Egerton had caught sight of the open portfolio, and had insisted on looking over the sketches—not the first of Milly's that he had seen by a great many. I noticed the grave, almost tender smile with which he looked at the little artistic "bits" out of Cumber Wood. He went on talking to Mr. Darrell all the time he was looking at these sketches; talking of the neighborhood and the changes that had come about of late years, and a little of the Priory, and his intentions with regard to improvements.

"I can only creep along at a snail's pace," he said; "for I am determined not to get into debt, and I won't sell."

"I wonder you never tried to let the Priory in all those years that you were abroad," suggested Mr. Darrell.

Mr. Egerton shook his head, with a smile.

"I couldn't bring myself to that," he said, "though I wanted money badly enough. There has never been a strange master at Cumber since it belonged to the Egertons. I daresay it's a foolish piece of sentimentality on my part; but I had rather fancy the old place rotting slowly to decay than in the occupation of strangers."

He was standing by the table where the open portfolio lay, with Milly by his side, and one of the sketches in his hands, when Mrs. Darrell came in at the window nearest to this little group, and stood on the threshold looking at him. I think I was the only person who saw her face at that moment. It was so sudden a look that came upon it, a look half terror, half pain, and it passed away so quickly, that I had scarcely time to distinguish the expression before it was gone; but it was a look that brought back to my memory the almost forgotten scene in the little study at Cumber Priory, and set me wondering what it could be that made the sight of Angus Egerton, either on canvas or in the flesh, a cause of agitation to Milly's step-mother.

In the next moment Mr. Darrell was presenting his visitor to his wife; and as the two acknowledged the introduction, I stole a glance at Mr. Egerton's face. It was paler than usual; and the expression of Mrs. Darrell's countenance seemed in a manner reflected in it. It was not possible that such looks could be without some significance. I felt convinced that these two people had met before.

There was a change in Mr. Egerton's manner from the moment of that introduction. He laid down Milly's sketch without another word, and stood with his eyes fixed on Augusta Darrell's face with a strange half-bewildered look, like a man who doubts the evidence of his own senses. Mrs. Darrell, on the contrary, seemed, after that one look which I had seen, quite at her ease, and rattled on gaily about the delight of travelling in the Tyrol, as compared to the dulness of life at Thornleigh.

"I hope you will enliven us a little, Mr. Egerton," she said. "It is quite an agreeable surprise to find a new neighbor."

"I ought to be very much flattered by that remark; but I doubt my power to add to the liveliness of this part of the world. And I do not think I shall stay much longer at Cumber."

Milly glanced up at him with a surprised look.

"Mrs. Collingwood told us you were quite settled at the Priory," she said, "and that you intended to spend the rest of your days as a country squire."

"I may have dreamed such a dream sometimes, Miss Darrell; but there are dreams that never fulfil themselves."

He had recovered himself by this time, and spoke in his accustomed tone. Mr. Darrell asked him to dinner on an early day, when I knew the Rectory people were coming to us, and the invitation was accepted.

Julian Stormont had followed Mrs. Darrell in from the terrace, and had remained in the background, a very attentive listener and observer during the conversation that followed.

"So that is Angus Egerton," he said, when our visitor had left us.

"Yes, Julian. O, by the bye, I forgot to introduce you; you came in so quietly," answered Mr. Darrell.

"I can't say I particularly care about the honor of knowing that gentleman," said Mr. Stormont in a half-contemptuous tone.

"Why not?" Milly asked quietly.

"Because I never heard any good of him."

"But he has reformed, it seems," said Mr. Darrell, "and is leading quite a steady life at Cumber, the Collingwoods tell me. Augusta and I called at the Rectory this morning, and the Rector and his wife talked a good deal of him. I was rather pleased with him, I confess, just now."

Milly looked up at her father gratefully. Poor child! how innocently and unconsciously she betrayed her secret! and how little she thought of the jealous eyes that were watching her! I saw Julian Stormont's face darken with an angry look, and I knew that he had already discovered the state of Milly's feelings in relation to Angus Egerton.

He was still with us when Mr. Egerton came to dinner two days later. I shall never forget that evening. The day was oppressively warm, with that dry sultry heat of which there had been so much during the latter part of the summer; and

as the afternoon advanced, the air grew still, with that palpable stillness which so often comes before a thunder-storm. Milly had been full of life and vivacity all day, flitting from room to room with a kind of joyous restlessness. She took unusual pains with her toilette for so simple a party, and came into my room looking like Titania in her gauzy white dress, with half-blown blush-roses in her hair, and more roses in a bouquet at her waist.

Mr. Egerton came a little later than the party from the Rectory, and after shaking hands with Mr. Darrell, made his way at once to the place where Milly and I were sitting.

"Any more sketching since I was here last, Miss Darrell?" he asked.

"No. I have been doing nothing for the last day or two."

"Do you know I have been thinking of your work in that way a good deal since I called here. I am stronger in criticism than in execution, you know. I think I was giving you a little lecture on your shortcomings, wasn't I?"

"Yes; but you left off so abruptly in the middle of it, that I don't fancy it was very profitable to me," Milly answered in rather a piqued tone.

"Did I really? O yes, I remember. I was quite startled by Mrs. Darrell's appearance. She is so surprisingly like a lady I knew a long time ago."

"That is rather a curious coincidence," I said.

"How a coincidence?" asked Mr. Egerton.

"Mrs. Darrell said almost the same thing about your portrait when we were at Cumber one day. It reminded her of some one she had known long ago."

"What an excellent memory you have for small events, Miss Crofton!" said a voice close behind me.

It was Mrs. Darrell's. She had come across the room towards us, unobserved by me, at any rate. Whether Angus Egerton had seen her or not, I do not know. He rose to shake hands with her, and then went on talking about Milly's sketching.

Mr. Collingwood took Mrs. Darrell in to dinner, and Mr.

Egerton gave his arm to Milly, and was seated next her at the prettily decorated table, upon which there was always a wealth of roses at this time of year. I saw Augusta Darrell's eyes wander restlessly in that direction many times during dinner, and I felt that the dear girl I loved so fondly was in an atmosphere of falsehood. What was the nature of the past acquaintance between those two people? and why was it tacitly denied by both of them? If it had been an ordinary friendship, there could have been no reason for this concealment and suppression. I had never quite made up my mind to trust Angus Egerton, though I liked and admired him: and this mysterious relation between him and Augusta Darrell was a sufficient cause for serious distrust.

"I wish she cared for him less," I said to myself, as I glanced at Milly's bright happy face.

When we went back to the drawing-room after dinner, the Miss Collingwoods had a great deal to say to Milly about a grand croquet-match which was to take place in a week or two at Pensildon, Sir John and Lady Pensildon's place, fourteen miles from Thornleigh. The Rector's daughters, both of whom were several years older than Milly, were passionately fond of croquet and everything in the way of gaiety, and were full of excitement about this coming event, discussing what they were going to wear, and what Milly was going to wear, on the occasion. While they were engaged in this way, Mrs. Collingwood told me a long story about one of her poor parishioners, always an inexhaustible subject with her. This arrangement left Mrs. Darrell unoccupied; and after standing at one of the open windows looking listlessly out, she sauntered out upon the terrace, her favorite lounge always in this summer weather. I saw her repass the windows a few minutes afterwards, in earnest conversation with Angus Egerton. This was some time before the other gentlemen left the dining-room; and they were still walking slowly up and down when Mr. Darrell and the Rector came to the drawing-room. The storm had not yet come, and it was bright moonlight. Mr. Darrell went out and brought his wife

in, with some gentle reproof on her imprudence in remaining out of doors so late in her thin muslin dress.

After this there came some music. Augusta Darrell sang some old English ballads which I had never heard her sing before—simple pathetic melodies, which, I think, brought tears to the eyes of all of us.

Mr. Egerton sat near one of the open windows, with his face in shadow, while she was singing; and as she began the last of these old songs he rose with a half-impatient gesture, and went out upon the terrace. If I watched him closely, and others in relation to him, at this time, it was from no frivolous or impertinent curiosity, but because I felt very certain my darling's happiness was at stake. I saw her little disappointed look when he remained at the farther end of the room, talking to the gentlemen, all the rest of that evening, instead of contriving by some means to be near her, as he always had done during our pleasant evenings at the Rectory.

CHAPTER IX.

ANGUS EGERTON IS REJECTED.

THE expected storm came next day, and Milly and I were caught in it. We had gone for a ramble across the moor, and were luckily within a short distance of Rebecca Thatcher's cottage when the first vivid flash broke through the leaden clouds, and the first long peal of thunder came crashing over the open landscape. We set off for Mrs. Thatcher's habitation at a run, and arrived there breathless.

The herbalist was not alone. A tall dark figure stood between us and the little window as we went in, blotting out all the light.

Milly gave a faint cry of surprise; and as the figure turned towards us, I recognised Mr. Egerton.

In all our visits among the poor we had never met him before.

"Caught again, young ladies!" he cried, laughing; "you've neither of you grown weatherwise yet, I see. Luckily you're

under cover before the rain has began. I think we shall have it pretty heavy presently. How surprised you look to see me here, Miss Darrell! Becky is a very old friend of mine. I remember her ever since I can remember anything. She was in my grandfather's service once upon a time."

"That I was, Mr. Egerton, and there's nothing I wouldn't do for you and yours—for you at least, for there's none but you left now. But I suppose you'll be getting married one of these days; you're not going to let the old name of Egerton die out?"

Angus Egerton shook his head with a slow sad gesture.

"I am too poor to marry, Mrs. Thatcher," he said. "What could I offer a wife but a gloomy old house, and a perpetual struggle to make hundreds do the work of thousands? I am too proud to ask the woman I love to sacrifice her future to me."

"Cumber Priory is good enough for any woman that ever lived," answered Rebecca Thatcher. "You don't mean what you say, Mr. Egerton. You know that the name you bear is counted better than money in these parts."

He laughed, and changed the conversation.

"I heard you young ladies talking a great deal of the Pensildon fête last night," he said.

"Did you, really?" asked Milly; "you did not appear to be much interested in our conversation."

"Did I seem distrait? It is a way I have sometimes, Miss Darrell; but I can assure you I can hear two or three conversations at once. I think I heard all that you and the Miss Collingwoods were saying."

"You are going to Lady Pensildon's on the 31st, I suppose?" Milly said.

"I think not. I think of going abroad for the autumn. I have been rather a long time at Cumber, you know, and I'm afraid the roving mood is coming upon me again. I shall be sorry to go, too, for I had intended to torment you continually about your art studies. You have really a genius for landscape, you know, Miss Darrell; you only want to be goaded into in-

dustry now and then by some severe critic like myself. Is your cousin, Mr. Stormont, an artist, by the way?"

"Not at all."

"That's a pity. He seems a clever young man. I suppose he will be a great deal with you, now that Mr. and Mrs. Darrell have returned?"

"He cannot stay very long at a time. He has the chief position in papa's counting-house."

"Indeed! He looked a little as if the cares of business weighed upon his spirit."

He glanced rather curiously at Milly while he was speaking of Mr. Stormont. Was he really going away, I wondered, or was that threat of departure only a lover-like ruse?

The rain came presently with all the violence usual to a thunder-shower. We were prisoners in Mrs. Thatcher's cottage for more than an hour; a happy hour, I think, to Milly, in spite of the closeness of the atmosphere and the medical odor of the herbs. Angus Egerton stood beside her chair all the time, looking down at her bright face and talking to her; while Mrs. Thatcher mumbled a long catalogue of her ailments and troubles into my somewhat inattentive ear.

Once while those two were talking about his intended departure I heard Mr. Egerton say,—

"If I thought any one cared about my staying—if I could believe that any one would miss me ever so little—I should be in no hurry to leave Yorkshire."

Of course Milly told him that there were many people who would miss him—Mr. Collingwood for instance, and all the family at the Rectory. He bent over her, and said something in a very low voice—something that brought vivid blushes to her face; and a few minutes afterwards they went to the door to look at the weather, and stood there talking till I had heard the last of Mrs. Thatcher's woes, and was free to join them. I had never seen Milly look so lovely as she did just then with her downcast eyes, and a little tremulous smile upon her perfect mouth.

Mr. Egerton walked all the way home with us. The storm was quite over, the sun shining, and the air full of that cool freshness which comes after rain. We talked of all kinds of things. Mr. Egerton had almost made up his mind to spend the autumn at Cumber, he told us; and he would go to the Pensildon fête, and take Milly's side in the croquet-match. He seemed in almost boyish spirits during that homeward walk.

When we went up-stairs to our rooms that night, Milly followed me into mine. There was nothing new in this; we often wasted half an hour in happy idle talk before going to bed; but I was sure from my darling's manner she had something to tell me. She went over to an open window, and stood there with her face turned away from me, looking out across the distant moonlit sea.

"Mary," she said, after a very long pause, "do you think people are intended to be quite happy in this world?"

"My dear love, how can I answer such a question as that? I think that many people have their lives in their own hands, and that it rests with themselves to find happiness. And there are many natures that are elevated and purified by sorrow. I cannot tell what is best for us, dear. I cannot pretend to guess what this life was meant to be."

"There is something in perfect happiness that frightens one, Mary. It seems as if it could not last. If it could, if I dared believe in it, I should think that my life was going to be quite happy."

"Why should it be otherwise, my dear Milly? I don't think you have ever known much sorrow."

"Not since my mother died—and I was only a child then—but that old pain has never quite gone out of my heart; and papa's marriage has been a greater grief to me than you would believe, Mary. This house has never seemed to be really my home since then. No, dear, it is a new life that is dawning for me—and O, such a bright one!"

She put her arms round my neck, and hid her face upon my shoulder.

"Can you guess what Angus Egerton said to me to-day?" she asked in a low tremulous voice.

"Was it something very wonderful, dear—or something as old as the world we live in?"

"Not old to me, Mary—new and wonderful beyond all measure. I did not think he cared for me—I had never dared to hope; for I have liked him a little for a long time, dear, though I don't suppose you ever thought so."

"My dear girl, I have known it from the very beginning. There is nothing in the world more transparent than your thoughts about Angus Egerton have been to me."

"O Mary, how could you! And I have been so careful to say nothing!" she cried reproachfully. "But he loves me, dear. He has loved me for a long time, he says; and he has asked me to be his wife."

"What, after all those protestations about never asking a woman to share his poverty?"

"Yes, Mary; and he meant what he said. He told me that if I had been a penniless girl, he should have proposed to me ever so long ago. And he is to see papa to-morrow."

"Do you think Mr. Darrell will ever consent to such a marriage, Milly?" I asked gravely.

"Why should he not? He cannot go on thinking badly of Angus when every one else thinks so well of him. You must have seen how he has softened towards him since they met. Mr. Egerton's old family and position are quite an equivalent for my money, whatever that may be. O Mary, I don't think papa can refuse his consent."

"I am rather doubtful about that, Milly. It's one thing to like Mr. Egerton very well as a visitor—quite another to accept him as a son-in-law. Frankly, my dearest, I fear your father will be against the match."

"Mary," cried Milly reproachfully, "I can see what it is—you are prejudiced against Mr. Egerton."

"I am only anxious for your welfare, darling. I like Mr. Egerton very much. It is difficult for any one to avoid liking

him. But I confess that I cannot bring myself to put entire trust in him."

"Why not?"

I did not like to tell her the chief reason for my distrust—that mysterious relation between Angus Egerton and Mrs. Darrell. The subject was a serious—almost a dangerous—one; and I had no positive evidence to bring forward in proof of my fancy. It was a question of looks and words that had been full of significance to me, but which might seem to Milly to mean very little.

"We cannot help our instinctive doubts, dear. But if you can trust Mr. Egerton, and if your father can trust him, my fancies can matter very little. I cannot stand between you and your love, dear—I know that."

"But you can make me very unhappy by your doubts, Mary," she answered.

I kissed her, and did my best to console her; but she was not easily to be comforted, and left me in a half-sorrowful, half-angry mood. I had disappointed her, she told me—she had felt so sure of my sympathy; and instead of sharing her happiness, I had made her miserable by my fanciful doubts and gloomy forebodings. After she had gone, I sat by the window for a long time, thinking of her disconsolately, and feeling myself very guilty. But I had a fixed conviction that Mr. Darrell would refuse to receive Angus Egerton as his daughter's suitor, and that the course of this love-affair was not destined to be a smooth one.

The result proved that I had been right. Mr. Egerton had a long interview with Mr. Darrell in the library next morning, during which his proposal was most firmly rejected. Milly and I knew that he was in the house, and my poor girl walked up and down our sitting-room with nervously-clasped hands and an ashy pale face all the time those two were together down-stairs.

She turned to me with a little piteous look when she heard Angus Egerton ride away from the front of the house.

"O Mary, what is my fate to be?" she asked. "I think he

has been rejected. I do not think he would have gone away without seeing me if the interview had ended happily."

A servant came to summon us both to the library. We went down together, Milly's cold hand clasped in mine.

Mr. Darrell was not alone. His wife was sitting with her back to the window, very pale, and with an angry brightness in her eyes.

"Sit down, Miss Crofton," Mr. Darrell said very coldly; "and you, Milly, come here."

She went towards him with a slow, faltering step, and sank down into the chair to which he pointed, looking at him all the time in an eager beseeching way that I think must have gone to his heart. He was standing with his back to the empty fireplace, and remained standing throughout the interview.

"I think you know that I love you, Milly," he began, "and that your happiness is the chief desire of my mind."

"I am sure of that, papa."

"And yet you have deceived me."

"Deceived you? O papa, in what way?"

"By encouraging the hopes of a man whom you must have known I would never receive as your husband; by suffering your feelings to become engaged, without one word of warning to me, and in a manner that you must have known could not fail to be most obnoxious to me."

"O papa, I did not know; it was only yesterday that Mr. Egerton spoke for the first time. There has been nothing hidden from you."

"Nothing? Do you call your intimate acquaintance with this man nothing? He may have delayed any actual declaration until my return—with an artful appearance of consideration for me; but some kind of love-affair must have been going on between you all the time."

"No, indeed, papa; until yesterday there was never anything but the most ordinary acquaintance. Mary knows—"

"Pray don't appeal to Miss Crofton," her father interrupted sternly. "Miss Crofton has done very wrong in encouraging

this affair. Miss Crofton heard my opinion of Angus Egerton a long time ago."

"Mary has done nothing to encourage our acquaintance. It has been altogether a matter of accident from first to last. What have you said to Mr. Egerton, papa? Tell me at once, please."

She said this with a quiet firmness, looking bravely up at him all the while.

"I have told him that nothing would induce me to consent to such a marriage. I have forbidden him ever to see you again."

"That seems very hard, papa."

"I thought you knew my opinion of Mr. Egerton."

"It would change if you knew more of him."

"Never. I might like him very well as a member of society; I could never approve of him as a son-in-law. Besides, I have other views for you—long-cherished views—which I hope you will not disappoint."

"I don't know what you mean by that, papa; but I know that I can never marry any one except Mr. Egerton. I may never marry at all, if you refuse to change your decision upon this subject; but I am quite sure I shall never be the wife of any one else."

Her father looked at her angrily. That hard expression about the lower part of the face, which I had noticed in his portrait and in himself from the very first, was intensified to-day. He looked a stern resolute man, whose will was not to be moved by a daughter's pleading.

"We shall see about that by and by," he said. "I am not going to have my plans defeated by a girl's folly. I have been a very indulgent father, but I am not a weak or yielding one. You will have to obey me, Milly, or you will find yourself a substantial sufferer by and by."

"If you mean that you will disinherit me, papa, I am quite willing that you should do that," Milly answered resolutely. "Perhaps you think Mr. Egerton cares for my fortune. Put him to the test, papa. Tell him that you will give me nothing, and that he may take me on that condition."

Augusta Darrell turned upon her step-daughter with a sudden look in her face that was almost like a flame.

"Do you think him so disinterested?" she asked. "Have you such supreme confidence in his affection?"

"Perfect confidence."

"And you do not believe that mercenary considerations have any weight with him? You do not think that he is eager to repair his shattered fortunes? You think him all truth and devotion? He, a *blasé* man of the world, of three-and-thirty; a man who has outlived the possibility of anything like a real attachment; a man who lavished his whole stock of feeling upon the one attachment of his youth."

She said all this very quietly, but with a suppressed bitterness. I think it needed all her powers of restraint to keep her from some passionate outburst that would have betrayed the secret of her life. I was now more than ever convinced that she had known Angus Egerton in the past, and that she had loved him.

"You see, I am not afraid of his being put to the test," Milly said proudly. "I know that he loved some one very dearly, a long time ago. He spoke of that yesterday. He told me that his old love had died out of his heart years ago."

"He told you a lie," cried Mrs. Darrell. "Such things never die. They sleep, perhaps—like the creatures that hide themselves in the ground and lie torpid all the winter—but with one breath of the past they flame into life again."

"I am not going to make any such foolish trial of your lover's faith, Milly," said Mr. Darrell. "Whether your fortune is or is not a paramount consideration with him can make no possible difference in my decision. Nothing will ever induce me to consent to your marrying him. Of course, if you choose to defy me, you are of age and your own mistress; but on the day that makes you Angus Egerton's wife you will cease to be my daughter."

"Papa," cried Milly, "you will break my heart."

"Nonsense, child; hearts are not so easily broken. Let me

hear no more of this unfortunate business. I have spoken to you very plainly, in order that there might be no chance of misunderstanding between us; and I rely upon your honor that there shall be no clandestine meeting between you and Angus Egerton in the future. I look to you, Miss Crofton, also, and shall hold you answerable for any accidental encounters out walking."

"You need not be afraid, papa," Milly answered disconsolately. "I daresay Mr. Egerton will leave Yorkshire, as he spoke of doing yesterday."

"I hope he may," said Mr. Darrell.

Milly rose to leave the room. Half-way towards the door she stopped, and turned her white despairing face towards her father with a hopeless look.

"I shall obey you, papa," she said. "I could not bear to forfeit your love even for his sake. But I think you will break my heart."

Mr. Darrell went over to her and kissed her.

"I am acting best for your ultimate happiness, Milly, be sure of that," he said in a kinder tone than he had used before. "There, my love, go and be happy with Miss Crofton, and let us all agree to forget this business as quickly as possible."

This was our dismissal. We went back to Milly's pretty sitting-room, where the sun was shining and the warm summer air blowing on birds and flowers, and books and drawing materials, and all the airy trifles that had made our lives pleasant to us until that hour. Milly sat on a low stool at my feet, and buried her face in my lap, refusing all comfort. She sat like this for about an hour, weeping silently, and then rose suddenly and wiped the tears from her pale face.

"I am not going to lead you a miserable life about this, Mary," she said. We will never speak of it after to-day. And I will try to do my duty to papa, and bear my life without that new happiness which made it seem so bright. Do you think Mr. Egerton will feel the disappointment very much, Mary?"

"He cannot help feeling it, dear, if he loves you—as I believe he does."

"And we might have been so happy together! I was dreaming of Cumber Priory all last night. I thought it had been restored with some of my money, and that the old house was full of life and brightness. Will he go away, do you think, Mary?"

"I should think it very likely."

"And I shall never see him any more. I could not forfeit papa's love, Mary."

"It would be a hard thing if you were to do that for the sake of a stranger, dear."

"No, no, Mary; he is not a stranger to me; Angus Egerton is not a stranger. I know that he is noble and good. But my father was all the world to me a year ago. I could not do without his love. I must obey him."

"Believe me, dear, it will be wisest and best to do so. You cannot tell what changes may come to pass in the future. Obedience will make you very dear to your father; and the time may come in which he will think better of Mr. Egerton."

"O Mary, if I could hope that!"

"Hope for everything, dear, if you do your duty."

She grew a little more cheerful after this, and met her father at dinner with quite a placid face, though it was still very pale. Mrs. Darrell looked at her wonderingly, and with a half-contemptuous expression, I thought, as if this passion of her stepdaughter's seemed to her a very poor thing, after all.

Before the week was out, we heard that Mr. Egerton had left Yorkshire. We did not go to the Pensildon fête. Milly had a cold and kept her room, much to the regret of the Miss Collingwoods, who called every day to inquire about her. She made this cold—which was really a very slight affair—an excuse for a week's solitude, and at the end of that time reappeared among us with no trace of her secret sorrow. It was only I, who was always with her, and knew her to the core of her heart, who could have told how hard a blow that disappointment had been, and how much it cost her to bear it so quietly.

CHAPTER X.

CHANGES AT THORNLEIGH.

THE autumn and the early winter passed monotonously enough. There was a good deal of company at Thornleigh Manor at first, for Mrs. Darrell hated solitude; but after a little time she grew tired of the people her husband knew, and the dinners and garden parties became less frequent. I had found out, very soon after her return, that she was not happy—that this easy prosperous life was in some manner a burden to her. It was only in her husband's presence that she made any pretence of being pleased or interested in things. With him she was always the same—always deferential, affectionate, and attentive; while he, on his side, was the devoted slave of her every whim and wish.

She was not unkind to Milly, but those two seemed instinctively to avoid each other.

The winter brought trouble to Thornleigh Manor. It was well for Milly that she had tried to do her duty to her father, and had submitted herself patiently to his will. About a fortnight before Christmas Mr. Darrell went to North Shields to make his annual investigation of the wharves and warehouses, and to take a kind of review of the year's business. He never returned alive. He was seized with an apoplectic fit in the office, and carried to his hotel speechless. His wife and Milly were summoned by a telegraphic message, and started for Shields by the first train that could convey there; but they were too late. He expired an hour before their arrival.

I need not dwell upon the details of that sad time. Milly felt the blow severely; and it was long before I saw her smile, after that dark December day on which the fatal summons came. She had lost much of her joyousness and brightness after the disappointment about Angus Egerton, and this new sorrow quite crushed her.

They brought Mr. Darrell's remains to Thornleigh, and he was buried in the family vault under the noble old church

where his father and mother, his first wife, and a son who died in infancy had been buried before him. He had been very popular in the neighborhood, and was sincerely regretted by all who had known him.

Julian Stormont was chief-mourner at the unpretentious funeral. He seemed much affected by his uncle's death; and his manner towards his cousin had an unusual gentleness.

I was present at the reading of the will, which took place in the dining-room immediately after the funeral. Mrs. Darrell, Milly, Mr. Stormont, myself, and the family lawyer were the only persons assembled in the spacious room, which had a dreary look without the chief of the household.

The will had been made a few months after Mr. Darrell's second marriage. It was very simple in its wording. To Julian Stormont he left a sum of five thousand pounds, to be paid out of his funded property; all the rest of his property, with the sum to be realised by the sale of the business at North Shields and its belongings—an amount likely to be very large—was to be divided equally between Mrs. Darrell and her step-daughter. Thornleigh Manor was left to Mrs. Darrell for her life, but was to revert to Milly, or to Milly's heirs, at her death; and Milly was to be entitled to occupy her old home until her marriage.

In the event of Milly's dying unmarried, her share of the funded property was to be divided equally between Mrs. Darrell and Julian Stormont, and in this case the Thornleigh estate was to revert to Julian Stormont after the death of Mrs. Darrell. The executors to the will were Mr. Foreman the lawyer, and Mrs. Darrell.

Milly's position was now one of complete independence. Mr. Foreman told her that after the sale of the iron-works she would have an income of something like four thousand a year. She had been of age for more than six months, and there was no one to come between her and perfect independence.

Knowing this, I felt that it was more than probable Mr. Egerton would speedily return to renew his suit; and I had

little doubt that it would be successful. I knew how well Milly loved him; and now that her father was gone she could have no motive for refusing him.

"You will stay with me, won't you, Mary?" she said to me as we sat by the fire in mournful silence that afternoon. "You are my only comfort now, dear. I suppose I shall remain here —for some time, at any rate. Augusta spoke to me very graciously, and begged that I would make this my home, according to my father's wish. We should not interfere with each other in any way, she said, and it was indeed more than probable she would go on the Continent with her maid early in the spring, and leave me sole mistress of Thornleigh. She doubted if she could ever endure the place now, she said. She is not like me, Mary. I shall always have a melancholy love for the house in which I have lived so happily with my father."

So I remained with my dear girl, and life at Thornleigh Manor glided by in a quiet melancholy fashion. If Mrs. Darrell grieved for her dead husband, her sorrow was of a cold tearless kind; but she kept her own rooms a good deal, and we did not see much of her. The Collingwoods were full of sympathy for their "darling Milly," and their affection had some cheering influence upon her mind. From them she heard occasionally of Mr. Egerton, who was travelling in the wildest regions of Northern Europe. She very rarely spoke of him herself at this time; and once when I mentioned his name she checked me reproachfully.

"Don't speak about him, Mary," she said; "I don't want to think of him. It seems like a kind of treason against papa. It seems like taking advantage of my dear father's death."

"Would you refuse to marry him, Milly, if he were to come back to you, now that you are your own mistress?"

"I don't know that, dear. I think I love him too much to do that. And yet it would seem like a sin against my father."

The spring months passed, and Milly brightened a little as the days went by. She spent a deal of time amongst the poor; and I think her devotion to that duty helped her to put aside

her sorrow more than anything else could have done. I was always with her, sharing in all her work; and I do not believe she had a thought hidden from me at this time.

Mrs. Darrell had not gone abroad yet. She lived a useless, listless life, doing nothing, and caring for nothing as it seemed. More than once she made preparations for her departure, and then changed her mind at the last moment.

Late in June we heard of Mr. Egerton's return to Cumber; and a few days after that he came to Thornleigh. Mrs. Darrell was in her own room, Milly and I alone in the drawing-room, when he called. My poor girl turned very pale, and the tears came into her eyes as she and Angus Egerton met. He spoke of her loss with extreme delicacy, and was full of tender sympathy. He had news to tell her of himself. A distant relation of his mother's had died lately, leaving him six thousand a year. He had come back to restore Cumber to its old splendor, and to take his proper place in the county.

While they were talking together in low confidential tones, not at all embarrassed by my presence, Mrs. Darrell came into the room. She was paler than usual; but there was an animation in her face that had not been there for a long time. She received Mr. Egerton very graciously, and insisted upon his staying to dinner.

The evening passed very pleasantly. I had never seen Augusta Darrell so agreeable, so fascinating, as she was that night. She touched the piano for the first time since her husband's death, and sang and played with all her old fire, keeping Angus Egerton a prisoner by the side of the piano. Hers was not music to be heard with indifference by the coldest ear.

He came again very soon, and came often. The restorations at Cumber had begun, and he insisted on our driving over to see what he was going to do. We went in compliance with his wish, and I could not but observe how anxiously he questioned Milly as to her opinion of the alterations, and how eagerly he sought for suggestions as to the arrangement and decoration of the different rooms. We spent some hours in this inspection,

and stayed to luncheon, in the noble old tapestried drawing-room.

It was not very long before Mr. Egerton had renewed his suit, and had been accepted. Had Mr. Darrell lived, the altered circumstances of the suitor would, in all probability, have made some alterations in his ideas upon this subject. He could no longer have supposed that Angus Egerton was influenced by mercenary feelings.

My darling seemed perfectly happy in her engagement, and I shared her happiness. I was always to live with her, she said, at Cumber as well as at Thornleigh. She had told Angus this, and he was pleased that it should be so. I thought that she would have no need of me in her wedded days, and that this loving fancy of hers was not likely to be realised; but I allowed her to cherish it—time enough for out parting when it needs must come. My youth had been brightened by her love; and I should be brave enough to face the world alone when she began her new life, assured that in my day of trouble I should always find a haven in her affection.

They were to be married in the following spring. Mr. Egerton had pleaded hard for an earlier date; but Milly would not diminish her year of mourning for her father, and he was fain to submit. The appointed time was advanced from April to February. He was to take his young wife abroad, and to show her all those scenes in which his wandering life had been spent; and then they were to return to Cumber, and Milly was to begin her career as the wife of a country squire.

Julian Stormont came to Thornleigh, and heard of the engagement from Mrs. Darrell. He still occupied his old position in the business at North Shields, which had been bought by a great capitalist in the iron way. He received the news of Milly's betrothal very quietly; but he proffered her no congratulations on the subject. I happened to be on the terrace alone with him one very fine morning during his stay, waiting for Milly to join me, when he earnestly spoke to me about this business.

"So my cousin is going to throw herself away upon that man?" he said.

"You must not call it throwing herself away, Mr. Stormont," I answered; "Mr. Egerton is devoted to your cousin, and the change in his circumstances makes him a very good match for her."

"The change in his circumstances has not changed the man," he returned in an angry tone. "No good can come of such a marriage."

"You have no right to say that, Mr. Stormont."

"I have the right given me by conviction. A happy marriage!—no, it will not be a happy marriage, be sure of that."

He said this with a vindictive look that startled me, well as I knew that he could not feel very kindly towards Milly's lover. The words might mean little, but to me they sounded like a threat.

CHAPTER XI.

DANGER.

THE summer that year was a divine one, and we spent the greater part of our lives out of doors, driving, walking, sitting about the garden sometimes until long after dark. It was weather in which it was a kind of treason against Nature to waste an hour in the house.

We went very often for long rambles in Cumber Wood, winding up with an afternoon tea-drinking in the little study at the Priory—a home-like, unceremonious entertainment which Milly delighted in. She used to seem to me on those occasions like some happy child playing at being mistress of the house.

Augusta Darrell was almost always with us. I was sorely puzzled and perplexed by her conduct at this time. It seemed to be all a kind step-mother's could be. Her old indifferent air had quite vanished; she was more cordial, more affectionately interested in Milly's happiness than I had supposed it possible she could be. The girl was completely melted by the change in

ner manner, and responded to this new warmth with artless confidence in its reality.

I remembered all I had seen and all I had suspected, and I could not bring myself to believe implicitly in Milly's step-mother. There was a shadowy fear, a vague distrust in my mind, not to be put away.

As I have said, she was always with us, entering into all our simple amusements with an appearance of girlish pleasure. Our picnics, our sketching expeditions, our afternoon tea-parties at the Priory, our croquet-matches with the Rector's daughters seemed all alike agreeable to her. I noticed that her toilet was always perfect on these occasions, and that she neglected no art which could add to her attractiveness; but she never in any way attempted to absorb Mr. Egerton's attention—she never ignored his position as Milly's accepted suitor.

For a long time I was deceived by her manner—almost convinced that if ever she had cared for Angus Egerton in the past, it was a passion that had died out of her heart. But there came a day when one look of hers betrayed the real state of the case, and showed me that all this newly-awakened regard for Milly, and pleasant participation in her happiness, had been only a careful piece of acting. It was nothing but a look—one earnest, despairing, passionate look—that told me this, but it was a look that betrayed the secret of a life. From that moment I never again trusted Augusta Darrell.

With the beginning of autumn the weather changed, and there came a dull rainy season. Trouble came to us with the change of the weather. There was a good deal of low fever about Thornleigh, and Milly caught it. She had never neglected her visits amongst the poor, even in favor of those pleasant engagements with Angus Egerton; and there is no doubt she had taken the fever from some of the cottagers.

She was not alarmingly ill, nor was the fever supposed to be contagious, except under certain conditions. Mr. Hale, the Thornleigh doctor, made very light of the business, and assured us that his patient would be as well as ever in a week's time.

But in the meanwhile my dear girl kept her room, and I nursed her, with the assistance of her devoted little maid.

Mr. Egerton came every day, generally twice a day, to inquire about the invalid's progress, and would stay for half an hour, or longer, talking to Mrs. Darrell or to me. He was very much depressed by this illness, and impatient for his betrothed's recovery. He had been strictly forbidden to see her, as perfect repose was an essential condition to her well-being.

The week was nearly over, and Milly had improved considerably. She was now able to sit up for an hour or two every day, and the doctor promised Mr. Egerton that she should be in the drawing-room early in the following week. The weather had been incessantly wet during this time—dull, hopeless, perpetual rain day after day, without a break in the leaden sky. But at last there came a fine evening, and I went down to the terrace to take a solitary walk after my long imprisonment. It was between six and seven o'clock; Milly was asleep, and there was no probability of my being wanted in the sick-room for half an hour or so. I left ample instructions with my handy little assistant, and went down for my constitutional, muffled in a warm shawl.

It was dusk when I went out, and everything was unusually quiet, not a leaf was stirring in the stagnant atmosphere. Late as it was, the evening was almost oppressively warm, and I was glad to throw off my shawl. I walked up and down the terrace in front of the Hall for about ten minutes, and then went round towards the drawing-room windows. Before I had quite reached the first of these, I was arrested by a sound so strange that I stopped involuntarily to listen. Throughout all that followed, I had no time to consider whether I was doing right or wrong in hearing what I did hear; but I believe if I had had ample leisure for deliberation, it would have come to the same thing—I should have listened. What I heard was of such vital consequence to the girl I loved, that I think loyalty to her outweighed any treachery against the speaker.

The strange sound that brought me to a stand-still close to the wide-open window was the sound of a woman's passionate sob-

bing—such a storm of weeping as one does not hear many times in a life. I had never heard anything like it until that night.

Angus Egerton's sonorous voice broke in upon those tempestuous sobs almost angrily:

"Augusta, this is supreme folly."

The sobs went on for some minutes longer unchecked. I heard his step sounding heavily as he walked up and down the room.

"I am waiting to hear the meaning of all this," he said by and by. "I suppose there *is* some meaning."

"O Angus, is it so easy for you to forget the past?"

"It was forgotten long ago," he answered, "by both of us, I should think. When my mother bribed you to leave Ilfracombe, you bartered my love and my happiness for the petty price she was able to pay. I was a weak fool in those days, and I took the business to heart bitterly enough, God knows; but the lesson was a useful one, and it served its turn. I have never trusted myself to love any woman since that day, till I met the pure young creature who is to be my wife. Her truth is above all doubt; she will not sell her birthright for a mess of pottage."

"The mess of pottage was not for me, Angus. It was my father's bargain, not mine. I was told that you had done with me—that you had never meant to marry me. Yes, Angus, your mother told me that with her own lips—told me that she interfered to save me from misery and dishonor. And then I was hurried off to a cheap French convent, to learn to provide for myself. A couple of years' schooling was the price I received for my broken heart. That was what your mother called making me a lady. I think I should have gone mad in those two dreary years if it had not been for my passionate love of music. I gave myself up to that with my whole soul; my heart was dead; and they told me I made more progress in two years than other girls made in six. I had nothing else to live for."

"Except the hope of a rich husband," said Mr. Egerton, with a sneer.

"O God, how cruel a man can be to a woman he has once loved!" cried Mrs. Darrell, passionately. "Yes, I did marry a rich man, Angus; but I never schemed or tried to win him. The chance came to me without a hope or thought of mine. It was the chance of rescue from the dreariest life of drudgery that a poor dependent creature ever lived, and I took it. But I have never forgotten you, Angus Egerton, not for one hour of my life."

"I am sorry you should have taken the trouble to remember me," he answered very coldly. "For some years of my life I made it my chief business to forget you, and all the pain connected with our acquaintance; and having succeeded in doing that, it seems a pity that we should disturb the stagnant waters of that dead lake which men call the past."

"Would to God that we had never met again!" she said.

"I can quite echo that aspiration, if we are likely to have many such scenes as this."

"Cruel—cruel!" she muttered. "O Angus, I have been so patient! I have clung to hope in the face of despair. When my husband died I fancied your old love would reawaken. How can such things die? I thought it was to me you would come back—to me, whom you once loved so passionately—not to that girl. You came back to her, and still I was patient. I set myself against her to win back your love. Yes, Angus, I hoped to do that till very lately. And then I began to see that it was all useless. She is younger and handsomer than I."

"She is better than you, Augusta. It was not her beauty that won me, but something nobler and rarer than beauty: it was her perfect nature. The more faulty we are ourselves, the more fondly we cling to a good woman. But I don't want to say hard things, Augusta. Pray let us put all this folly aside at once and for ever. You took your course in the past, and it has landed you in a very prosperous position. Let me take mine in the present, and let us be friends, if possible."

"You know that is not possible. We must be all the world to each other, or the bitterest enemies."

"I shall never be your enemy, Mrs. Darrell."

"But I am yours; yes, I am yours from this night, and hers. You think I can look on tamely, and see you devoted to that girl! I have only been playing a part. I thought it was in my power to win you back."

All this was said with a kind of passionate recklessness, as if the speaker, having suddenly thrown off her mask, scarcely cared how utterly she degraded herself.

"Good-night, Mrs. Darrell. You will think of these things more wisely to-morrow. Let us be civil to each other, at least, while circumstances bring us together; and for God's sake be kind to your step-daughter! Do not think of her as a rival; my love for you had died long before I saw her. You need bear no malice against her on that account. Good-night."

"Good-night."

I heard the drawing-room door open and shut, and knew that he was gone. I walked on past the open windows, not caring if Mrs. Darrell saw me. It might be better for Milly, perhaps, that she should know I had heard her secret, and had been put upon my guard. But I do not think she saw me.

It was about a quarter of an hour later when I went in, and it was quite dark by that time. In the hall I met Mrs. Darrell, dressed for walking.

"I am going round the shrubberies, Miss Crofton," she said. "Insupportably close to-night, is it not? I think we shall all have the fever, if this weather lasts."

She did not wait for my answer, but passed out quickly. I went back to Milly's room, and found her still sleeping peacefully. Ten minutes afterwards I heard the rain beating against the windows, and knew that it had set in for a wet night.

"Mrs. Darrell will not be able to go far," I thought.

I sat by the bedside for some time thinking of what I had heard. It was something to have had so strong a proof of Angus Egerton's loyalty to my dear girl; and assured of that I did not fear Mrs. Darrell's malice. Yet I could not help wishing that the marriage had been appointed for an earlier

date, and that the time which step-mother and daughter were to spend together had been shorter.

Milly woke, and sat up for about half an hour, supported by pillows, to take a cup of tea, while I talked to her a little about the pleasantest subjects I could think of. She asked if Mr. Egerton had been at Thornleigh that evening.

"Yes, dear, he has been."

"Did you see him, Mary?"

"No; I did not see him."

She gave a little disappointed sigh. It was her delight to hear me repeat his messages to her, word for word, ever so many times over.

"Then you have nothing to tell me about him, dear?"

"Nothing; except that I know he loves you."

"Ah, Mary, there was a time when you doubted him."

"That time is quite past and gone, dear."

She kissed me as she gave me back her cup and saucer, and promised to go to sleep again, while I went to my room to write a long letter home.

I was occupied in this way for more than an hour; and then, having sealed my letter, went down with it to the hall, to put it on a table where all letters intended to be taken to the post in the morning were placed over night.

It was nearly ten o'clock by this time, and I was startled by the sound of the hall-door opening softly from without, while I was putting down my letter. I looked round quietly, and saw Mrs. Darrell coming in with dripping garments.

"Good gracious me!" I cried involuntarily; "have you been out all this time in the rain, Mrs. Darrell?"

"Yes, I have been out in the rain, Miss Crofton," she answered in a vexed impatient tone. "Is that so very shocking to your sober ideas of propriety? I could not endure the house to-night. One has feverish fancies sometimes—at least I have! and I preferred being out in the rain to not being out at all. Good-night."

She gave me a haughty nod, and ran up-stairs with a quick,

light step. The old butler came to lock and bolt the hall-door as the clock struck ten, according to unalterable custom; and I went back to my room, wondering what could have kept Mrs. Darrell out so long—whether she had been upon some special errand, or had only been wandering about the grounds in a purposeless way.

For some days Milly went on very well; then there came a little change for the worse. The symptoms were not quite so favorable. Mr. Hale assured us that there was no reason for alarm, the recovery was only a little retarded. He had not the least doubt that all would go well. Mr. Egerton was very quick to take fright, however, and insisted on Dr. Lomond, a famous provincial physician, being summoned immediately from Manchester.

The great man came, and his opinion coincided entirely with that of Mr. Hale. There was not the slightest cause for fear. Careful nursing and quiet were the two essential points. The patient's mind was to be made as happy as possible. The physician made minute inquiries as to the arrangements for attendance in the sick-room, and suggested a professional nurse. But I pleaded so hard against this, assuring him of my capacity for doing much more than I had to do, that he gave way, and consented to Milly being waited on only by myself and her maid.

Mrs. Darrell was present during this conversation, and I was rather surprised by her taking my side of the question with regard to the nursing, as it was her usual habit to oppose me upon all subjects. To-day she was singularly gracious.

Another week went by, and there was no change for the better, nor any very perceptible change for the worse. The patient was a little weaker, and suffered from a depression of mind, against which all my efforts were vain.

Angus Egerton came twice daily during this week, but he rarely saw Mrs. Darrell. I think he studiously avoided meeting her after that painful scene in the drawing-room. It was for me he inquired, and he used to come up-stairs to the cor-

ridor outside Milly's room, and stand there talking to me in a low voice, and feeling a kind of satisfaction, I believe, in being so near his darling.

Once I ventured to tell her that he was there, and to let him speak a few words for her to hear. But the sound of the voice she loved so well had such an agitating effect upon her that I sorely repented my imprudence, and took good care not to repeat it.

So the days went by, in that slow dreary way in which time passes when those we love are ill; and it seemed, in the dead calm of the sick-room, as if all the business of life had come to a stand-still.

I did not see much of Mrs. Darrell during this period. She came to Milly's door two or three times a day to ask about her progress, with all appearance of affection and anxiety; but throughout the rest of the day she remained secluded in her own rooms. I noticed that she had a wan, haggard look at this time, like that of a person who had existed for a long while without sleep; but this in no manner surprised me, after that scene in the drawing-room.

As the time went by, I felt that my strength was beginning to fail, and I sadly feared that we might have at last to employ the professional aid which the Manchester physician had suggested. I had slept very little from the beginning of Milly's illness, being too anxious to sleep when I had the opportunity of doing so; and I now began to suffer from the effects of this prolonged sleeplessness. But I struggled resolutely against fatigue, determined to see my dear girl through the fever if possible; and I succeeded wonderfully, by the aid of unlimited cups of strong tea, and always ably seconded by Susan Dodd, Milly's devoted maid.

Between us we two performed all the duties of the sick-room. The medicines, wine, soups, jellies, and all things required for the invalid were kept in the dressing-room, which communicated with the bedroom by one door, and had another door opening on to the corridor.

The sick-room, which was very large and airy, was by this means kept free from all litter; and Susan and I took pleasure in making it look bright and fresh. I used to fetch a bouquet from the garden every morning for the little table by the bed. At the very commencement of Milly's illness I had missed Peter, Mrs. Thatcher's grandson. I asked one of the men what had become of him, and was told that he had taken the fever and was lying ill at his grandmother's cottage. I mentioned this to Mrs. Darrell, and asked her permission to send him some wine and other little comforts, to which she assented.

The Manchester physician came a second time after a week's interval, and on this occasion he was not so positive in his opinion as to the case. He did not consider that there was peril as yet, he said; but the patient was weaker, and he was by no means satisfied. He prescribed a change of medicine, repeated his injunctions about care and quiet; and so departed, after requesting Mr. Hale to telegraph for him in the event of any change for the worse.

I was a good deal depressed by his manner this time, and went back to my dear girl's room with a heavier heart than I had known since her illness began.

It was my habit to take whatever sleep I could in the course of the afternoon, leaving Susan Dodd on guard so as to be able to sit up all night. Susan had begged very hard to share this night-watching, but I insisted upon her taking her usual rest, so as to be bright and fresh in the day. I felt the night-work was the more important duty, and could trust that to no one but myself.

Unfortunately it happened very often that I was quite unable to sleep when I went to my room in the afternoon to lie down. Half my time I used to lie there wide awake thinking of my darling girl, and praying for her speedy recovery. On the afternoon that followed the Manchester doctor's second visit I went to my room as usual; but I was more than ever disinclined to sleep. For the first time since the fever began I felt

a horrible dread that the end might be fatal; and I lay tossing restlessly from side to side, meditating on every word and look of the physician's, and trying to convince myself that there was no real ground for my alarm.

I had been lying awake like this for more than an hour, when I heard the door of Milly's dressing-room—which was close to my door—closed softly; and with a nervous quickness to take alarm I sprang up, and went out into the corridor, thinking that Susan was coming to summon me. I found myself face to face, not with Susan Dodd, but with Mrs. Darrell.

She gave a little start at seeing me, and stood with her hand still upon the handle of the dressing-room door, looking at me with the strangest expression I ever saw in any human countenance. Alarm, definance, hatred—what was it?"

"I thought you were asleep," she said.

"I have not been able to sleep this afternoon."

"You are a bad person for a nurse, Miss Crofton, if you cannot sleep at will. I am afraid you are nervous, too, by the way you darted out of the room just now."

"I heard that door shut and thought Susan was going to call me."

"I had just been in to see how the invalid was going on—that is all."

She passed me, and went back to her own apartments, which were on the other side of the house. I felt that it was quite useless trying to sleep; so I returned to my room only to change my dressing-gown for my dress, and then went back to Milly. She had been sleeping very quietly, Susan told me.

"I suppose you told Mrs. Darrell that all was going on well when she came to inquire just now?" I said

"Mrs. Darrell hasn't been since you went to lie down, Miss," the girl answered, looking surprised at my question.

"Why, Susan, you must surely forget. Mrs. Darrell was in the dressing-room scarcely ten minutes ago. I heard her coming out and went to see who was there. Didn't she come in here to to inquire about Miss Darrell?"

"No, indeed, miss."

"Then I suppose she must have peeped in at the door and seen that Miss Darrell was asleep," I said.

"I don't see how she could have opened that door without my hearing her, miss. It was shut fast, I know."

It had been shut when I went in through the dressing-room. I was puzzled by this incident, small as it was. I knew that Augusta Darrell hated her step-daughter, and I could not bear to think of that secret enemy hovering about the sick room. I was puzzled too by the look which I had seen in her face—no common look, and not easy to be understood. That she hated me, I had no doubt; but there had been fear as well as aversion in that look, and I could not imagine any possible reason for her fearing such an insignificant person as myself.

The rest of that evening and night passed without any event worth recording. I kept the door of communication between the bedroom and dressing-room wide open all night, determined that Augusta Darrell should not be in that room without my knowledge; but the night passed, and she never came near us.

When I went into the garden early the next morning to gather the flowers for Milly's room, I found Peter at work again. He looked very white and feeble, scarcely fit to be about just yet; but there he was, sweeping the fallen leaves into little heaps, ready for his barrow. He came to me while I was cutting the late roses for my bouquet, and asked after Milly. When I had answered him he loitered by me for a little in a curious way, as if he wanted to say something else; but I was too full of my own thoughts and cares to pay much attention to him.

The next day, and the next, brought no change in my darling, and I was growing every hour more anxious. I could see that Mr. Hale was puzzled and uneasy, though he said he saw no reason for telegraphing to Manchester, yet awhile. He was very attentive, and was reputed to be very clever; and I knew that he was really attached to Milly, whom he had attended from her infancy.

Angus Egerton saw me twice every day; and these brief interviews had now become very painful to me. I found it so difficult to cheer him with hopeful words, when my own heart was hourly growing heavier, and the fears that had been vague and shadowy were gathering strength and shape. I was very tired, but I held out resolutely; and I had never once slept for so much as a quarter of an hour upon my watch, until the second night after that meeting with Mrs. Darrell at the door of the dressing-room.

That night I was seized with an unconquerable sleepiness, about an hour after I had dismissed Susan Dodd. The room was very quiet, not a sound except the ticking of the pretty little clock upon the mantel-piece. Milly was fast asleep, and I was sitting on a low chair by the fire trying to read, when my drowsiness overcame me, my heavy eyelids fell, and I went off into a feverish kind of slumber, in which I was troubled with an uneasy consciousness that I ought to be awake.

I had slept in this way for a little more than an hour, when I suddenly started up broad awake. In the intense quiet of the room I had heard a sound like the chinking of glass, and I fancied that Milly had stirred.

There was a table near her bed, with a glass of cooling drink and a bottle of water upon it. I thought she must have stretched out her hand for this glass, and that in so doing she had pushed the glass against the bottle; but to my surprise I found her lying quite still, and fast asleep. The sound must have come from some other direction—from the dressing-room, perhaps.

I went into the dressing-room. There was no one there. No trace of the smallest disturbance among the things. The medicine bottles and the medicine-glass stood on the little table exactly as I had left them. I was very careful and precise in my arrangement of these things, and it would have been difficult for the slightest interference with them to have escaped me. What could that sound have been—some accidental shiver of the glass, stirred by a breath of wind, one of those mysterious

movements of inanimate objects which are so apt to occur in the dead hours of the night, and which seem always more or less ghostly to a nervous watcher? Could it have been only accidental? or had Mrs. Darrell been prowling stealthily in and out of that room again.

Why should she have been there? What could her secret coming and going mean? What purpose could she have in hovering about the sick girl? what could her hatred profit itself by such uneasy watchfulness, unless— Unless what? An icy coldness came over me, and I shook like a leaf, as a dreadful thought took shape in my mind. What if that desperate woman's hatred took the most awful form? what if her secret presence in that room meant murder?

I took up the medicine-bottle and examined it minutely. In color, in odor, in taste, the medicine seemed to me exactly what it had been from the time it had been altered, in accordance with the Manchester doctor's second prescription. Mr. Hale's label was on the bottle, and the quantity of the contents was exactly what it had been after I gave Milly her last dose—one dose gone out of the full bottle.

"O, no, no, no," I thought to myself; "I must be mad to imagine anything so awful. A woman may be weak, and wicked, and jealous, when she has loved as intensely as this woman seems to have loved Angus Egerton; but that is no reason she should become a murderess."

I stood with the medicine-bottle in my hand sorely perplexed. What could I do? Should I suspend the medicine for to-night, at the risk of retarding the cure? or should I give it in spite of that half suspicion that it had been tampered with?

What ground had I for such a suspicion? At that moment nothing but the sound that had awakened me, the chinking sound of one glass knocked against another.

Had I really heard any such sound, or had it only been a delusion of my half sleeping brain? While I stood weighing this question, a sudden recollection flashed across my mind, and I had no longer ground for doubt.

The cork of the medicine-bottle, when I gave Milly her last dose, had been too large for the bottle; so much so, that I had found it difficult to put it in again after giving the medicine. The cork of the bottle which I now held in my hand went in loosely enough. It was a smaller and an older-looking cork. This decided me. I placed the bottle under lock and key in Milly's wardrobe, and I gave her no more medicine that night.

There was no fear of my sleeping at my post after this. My thoughts for the rest of that night were full of horror and bewilderment. My course seemed clear enough, in one respect. The proper person to confide in would be Mr. Hale. He would be able to discover whether the medicine had been tampered with, and it would be his business to protect his patient.

CHAPTER XII.

DEFEATED.

I WENT down to the garden for the flowers as usual next morning, as I did not wish to make any palpable change in my arrangements; but before leaving the room I impressed upon Susan Dodd the necessity of remaining with her mistress during every moment of my absence, though I knew I had little need to counsel carefulness. Nothing was more unlikely than that Susan would neglect her duty for a moment.

Peter came again, as he had come to me on the previous morning. Again he lingered about me, as if he had something more to say, and could not take courage to say it. This time the strangeness of his manner aroused my curiosity, and I asked him if he had anything particular to say to me.

"You must be quick, Peter, whatever it is," I said; "for I am in a great hurry to get back to Miss Darrell."

"There is something I want to say, miss," he answered, twisting his ragged straw hat round and round in his bony hands, in a nervous way,—"something I should like to say, but I'm naught but a poor fondy, and don't know how to begin. Only you've been very good to Peter, you see, miss, sending wine and such

things when I was ill, and I ain't afeared o' you, as I am o' some folks."

"The wine was not mine, Peter. Be quick, please; tell me what you want to say."

"I can't come to it very easy, miss. It's something awful-like to tell on."

"Something awful?"

The boy had looked round him with a cautious glance, and was now standing close to me, and his light blue eyes fixed upon my face in a very earnest way.

"Speak out, Peter," I said; "you needn't be afraid of me."

"It happened when I was ill, you see, miss, and I've a sometimes thought as it might be no more than a dream. I had a many dreams while I were lying on that little bed in grandmother's room, wicked dreams, and this might be one of them; and yet it's real-like, and there isn't the muddle in it that there is in the other dreams."

"What is it Peter? O, pray, be quick!"

"I'm a-coming to it, miss. Is it wicked for folks to kill theirselves."

"Is it wicked? Of course it is—desperately wicked; a sin that can never be repented of."

"Then I know one that's going to do it."

"Who?"

"Mrs. Darrell."

He gave a solemn nod, and stood staring at me with wide-open awe-stricken eyes.

"How do you know that?"

"It was one dark night, when it was raining hard—I could hear it drip, drip, drip upon the roof just over where I was lying. It was when I was very bad, and lay still all day and couldn't speak. But I knew what grandmother said to me, and I knew everything that was going on, though I didn't seem to—that was the curious part of it. I had been asleep for a bit, and I woke up all of a sudden, and heard some one talking to grand-

mother in the next room—the door wasn't open, only ajar. I shouldn't have known who it was, for I'm not quick at telling voices, like other folks; but I heard grandmother call her Mrs. Darrell; and I heard the lady say that when one was sick and tired of life, and had no one left to live for, it was best to die; and grandmother laughed, and says yes, there wasn't much to live for, leastways not for such as her. And then they talked a little more; and then by and by Mrs. Darrell asked her for some stuff—I didn't hear the name of it, for Mrs. Darrell only whispered it. Grandmother says no, and stuck to it for a good time; but Mrs. Darrell offered her money, and then more and more money. She says it couldn't matter whether she got the stuff from her or from any one else. She could get it easily enough, she says, in any large town. And she didn't know as she should use it, she says. It was more likely than not she never would; but she wanted to have it by her, so as to feel she was able to put an end to her life, if ever it grew burdensome to her. "You'll never use it against any one else?" says grandmother; and Mrs. Darrell says who was there she could use it against, and what harm need she wish to anybody; she was rich enough, and had nothing to gain from anybody's death. So at last, after a deal of talk, grandmother gave her the stuff; and I heard her counting out money—I think it was a hundred pounds—and then she went away in the rain."

I remembered that night upon which Mrs. Darrell had stayed out so long in the rain—the night that followed her stormy interview with Angus Egerton.

I told Peter that he had done quite right in telling me this, and begged him not to mention it to any one else until I gave him permission to do so. I went back to Milly's room directly afterwards, and waited there for Mr. Hale's coming.

While I was taking my breakfast, Mrs. Darrell came to make her usual inquiries. I ran into the dressing-room to meet her. While she was questioning me about the invalid, I saw her look at the table where the medicine had always been until that morning, and I knew that she missed the bottle.

After she had made her inquiries, she stood for a few moments hesitating, and then said abruptly,

"I should like to see Mr. Hale when he comes this morning. I want to hear what he says about his patient. He will be here almost immediately, I suppose; so I will stay in Milly's room till he comes."

She went into the bedroom, bent over the invalid for a few minutes, talking in a gentle sympathetic voice, and then took her place by the bedside. It was evident to me that she had suspected something from the removal of the medicine, and that she intended to prevent my seeing Mr. Hale alone.

"You took your medicine regularly last night, I suppose, Milly?" she inquired presently, when I had seated myself at a little table by the window and was sipping my tea.

"I don't think you gave me quite so many doses last night, did you, Mary?" said the invalid, in her feeble voice. "I fancy you were more merciful than usual."

"It was very wrong of Miss Crofton to neglect your medicine. Mr. Hale will be extremely angry when he hears of it."

"I do not think Milly will be worse for the omission," I answered quietly.

After this we sat silently waiting for the doctor's appearance. He came in about a quarter of an hour, and pronounced himself better pleased with his patient than he had been the night before. There had been a modification of the more troublesome symptoms of the fever towards morning.

I told him of my omission to give the medicine.

"That was very wrong," he said.

"Yet you see she had a better night, Mr. Hale. I suppose that medicine was intended to modify those attacks of sickness from which she has suffered so much?"

"To prevent them altogether, if possible."

"That is very strange. It really appears to me that the medicine always increases the tendency to sickness."

Mr. Hale shook his head impatiently.

"You don't know what you are talking about, Miss Crofton," he said.

"May I say a few words to you alone, if you please?"

Mrs. Darrell rose with a hurried anxious look.

"What can you have to say to Mr. Hale alone, Miss Crofton?" she asked.

"It is about herself, perhaps," said the doctor kindly. "I have told her all along that she would be knocked up by this nursing; and now, I dare say, she begins to find I am right."

"Yes," I said, "it is about myself I want to speak."

Mrs. Darrell went to one of the windows, and stood with her face turned away from us, looking out. I followed Mr. Hale into the dressing-room.

I unlocked the wardrobe, took out the medicine bottle, and told the doctor my suspicions of the previous night. He listened to me with grave attention, but with an utterly incredulous look.

"A nervous fancy of yours, no doubt, Miss Crofton," he said; "however, I'll take the medicine back to my surgery and analyze it."

"I have something more to tell you, Mr. Hale."

"Indeed!"

I repeated, word for word, what Peter had told me about Mrs. Darrell's visit to his grandmother.

"It is a very extraordinary business," he said; "but I cannot imagine that Mrs. Darrell would be capable of such a hideous crime. What motive could she have for such an act?"

"I do not feel justified in speaking quite plainly upon that subject, Mr. Hale; but I have reason to know that Mrs. Darrell has a very bitter feeling about her step-daughter."

"I cannot think the thing you suspect possible. However, the medicine shall be analyzed; and we will take all precautions for the future. I will send you another bottle immediately, in a sealed packet. You will take notice that the seal is unbroken before you use the medicine.

He showed me his crest on a seal at the end of his pencil-case and then departed. The medicine came a quarter of an hour later in a sealed packet. This time I brought the bottle into the sick-room, and placed it on the mantel-piece, where it was impossible for any one to touch it.

When Mr. Hale came for his second visit, there was a grave and anxious look in his face. He was very well satisfied with the appearance of the patient, however, and pronounced that there was a change for the better—slight, of course, but quite as much as could be expected in so short a time. He beckoned me out of the room, and I went down stairs with him, leaving Susan Dodd with Milly.

"I am going to speak to Mrs. Darrell, and you had better come with me," he said.

She was in the library. Mr. Hale went in, and I followed him. She was sitting at the table, with writing materials scattered before her; but she was not writing. She had a strange preoccupied air; but at the sight of Mr. Hale she rose suddenly, and looked at him with a deadly white face.

"Is she worse?" she asked.

"No, Mrs. Darrell, she is better," he answered, sternly. "I find that we have been the dupes of some secret enemy of this dear child's. There has been an attempt at murder going on under our very eyes. Poison has been mixed with the medicine sent by me—a slow poison. Happily for us the poisoner has been a little too cautious for the success of the crime. The doses administered have been small enough to leave the chance of recovery. An accident awakened Miss Crofton's suspicions last night, and she very wisely discontinued the medicine. I have analyzed it since she gave it me, and find that a certain portion of irritant poison has been mixed with it."

For some moments after he had finished speaking Mrs. Darrell remained silent, looking at him fixedly with that awful death-like face.

"Who can have done such a thing?" she asked, at last, in a half-mechanical way.

"You must be a better judge of that question than I," answered Mr. Hale. "Is there any one in this house inimical to your step-daughter?"

"No one that I know of."

"We have two duties before us, Mrs. Darrell: the first, to protect our patient from the possibility of any farther attempt of this kind; the second, to trace the hand that has done this work. I shall telegraph to Leeds immediately for a professional nurse, to relieve Miss Crofton in the care of the sick-room, and I shall communicate at once with the police, in order that this house may be placed under surveillance."

Mrs. Darrell said not a word, either in objection or assent, to this. She seated herself by the table again, and began trifling idly with the writing materials before her.

"You will do what is best, of course, Mr. Hale," she said, after a long pause; "you are quite at liberty to act in this matter according to your own discretion."

"Thanks; it is a matter in which my responsibility entitles me to a certain amount of power. I shall telegraph to Dr. Lomond, asking him to come down to-morrow. Whatever doubt you may entertain of my judgment will be dispelled when I am supported by his opinion."

"Of course; but I have not expressed any doubt of your judgment."

We left her immediately after this—left her sitting before the table, with her restless hands turning over the papers.

The servant who went in search of her at seven o'clock that evening, when dinner was served, found her sitting there still, with a sealed letter lying on the table before her; but her head had fallen across the cushioned arm of the chair—she had been dead some hours.

There was a post-mortem examination and an inquest. Mrs. Darrell had taken poison. The jury brought in a verdict of suicide while in a state of unsound mind. The act seemed too causeless for sanity. Her strange-absent ways had attracted the attention of the servants for some time past, and the evi-

dence of her own maid respecting her restlessness and irritability for the last few months influenced the minds of coroner and jury.

The letter found lying on the table before her was addressed to Angus Egerton. He declined to communicate its contents when questioned about it at the inquest. Milly progressed towards recovery slowly, but surely, from the hour in which I stopped the suspected medicine. The time came when we were obliged to tell her of her step-mother's awful death; but she never knew the attempt that had been made on her own life, or the atmosphere of hatred in which she had lived.

We left Thornleigh for Scarborough as soon as she was well enough to be moved, and only returned in the early spring, in time for my darling's wedding.

She has now been married nearly seven years during which time her life has been very bright and happy—a life of almost uncheckered sunshine. She has carried out her idea of our friendship to the very letter; and we have never been separated, except during her honeymoon and my own visits home. Happily for my sense of independence, there are now plenty of duties for me to perform at Cumber Priory, where I am governess to a brood of pretty children, who call me auntie, and hold me scarcely second to their mother in their warm young hearts. Angus Egerton is a model country squire and master of the hounds; and he and his wife enjoy an unbroken popularity among rich and poor. Peter is under-gardener at the Priory, and no longer lives with his grandmother, who left her cottage soon after Mrs. Darrell's suicide, and is supposed to have gone to London.

OLD RUDDERFORD HALL.

CHAPTER I.

LD RUDDERFORD HALL lay back from the high-road, buried in trees, and all the traveller saw of it was a glimpse of mellow red-brick chimney, or an angle of the steep tiled roof, above oaks and elms that had been growing ever since the Norman Conquest, when all about the trim little out-of-the-world village of Rudderford was forest land.

New Rudderford Hall fronted the turnpike road, resplendent with three rows of shining plate-glass windows, a brilliant stuccoed front, a conservatory with a glass dome flashing in the summer sun, a prim lawn embellished with geometrical flower-beds, all ablaze with scarlet and yellow, and two pair of brand-new Birmingham iron gates, of florid design, surmounted by two pair of lamps. New Rudderford Hall looked what it was —the abode of commercial wealth. New Rudderford Hall gave dinner-parties, a ball once a year, hunting-breakfasts in the late autumn, private theatricals at Christmas. New Rudderford Hall had three rosy daughters and one stalwart hard-riding son, the apple of its eye.

Old Rudderford Hall rarely opened its rusty gates or unlocked its creaking doors. There was, indeed, a legend that no stranger had broken bread there for a century; yet there was a counter-story current to the effect that the master of Old Rud-

derford Hall could, when he chose, open a bottle of rare old wine for a visitor—Madeira that had voyaged three times to and fro the East Indies; golden-tinted Tokay; red and white Constantia; Malmsey that seemed so old it might have formed part of the contents of that ancient hogshead wherein poor Clarence elected to be drowned. Old Rudderford Hall had one only child, a daughter, fair to see, who rode an ancient purblind palfrey about the shady lanes round Rudderford, and was met sometimes in the dwellings of the poor, but never in that exalted sphere which Rudderford called "society." Old Rudderford Hall rejoiced in that patrician appendage—a family ghost.

The story went that a Champion of the days of the Stuarts had slain his wife in some fit of jealous fury, and that the poor lady's restless spirit—the legend hinted at her guilt—haunted the long dark passages and dismal chambers of the old house. It was not very clear that any one had ever seen her, but she was firmly believed in nevertheless, and plenty of people were able to give a graphic description of her—a tall, graceful lady, dressed in white, with flowing auburn hair falling over her neck and shoulders.

The present owner of the Hall was Anthony Champion, and the estate had belonged to the house of Champion ever since the days of Henry VIII., who, in the distribution of church property, had rewarded his liege servant, Thomas Champion, gentleman, for divers services not set down in the title-deeds of the estate, with the copyhold of Rudderford Chase and Rudderford Grange, previously held by a monkish fraternity settled in the neighborhood.

There were portions of the old Grange still standing—massive stone walls, pierced with narrow arched windows, a winding staircase, and low oak doors, iron-bound and studded with huge nails: but these stone buildings now served only as offices, and the Hall proper had been built by the aforesaid Thomas Champion, with much splendor and and lavish expenditure, in an age when architectural extravagance had been made fashionable by

the magnificent Wolsey. The house was one of the finest specimens of domestic architecture in England, but had been sorely neglected for the last century. Wherever decay could arise, it had risen, and a settled gloom had fallen upon the mansion and its surroundings. Only in the flower-garden was there any glimpse of neatness or brightness, and that was due to the care of Christabel Champion, who loved the old flower-beds, the grassy walks, the ancient roses, and who not only superintended the labors of a great hulking lad of seventeen, sole gardener of the Hall, but worked hard herself into the bargain.

Within, the gloom was almost oppressive. Anthony Champion was a man who lived amongst his books, and dreamed away his days over mouldy old folios and rare editions collected by his father, when the Champion purse was deeper than it was nowadays. He lived almost wholly in his library, only emerging at seven in the evening to share his daughter's frugal dinner, and to doze or muse for an hour or so afterwards in the long saloon. There was some little show of state and ceremony kept up at the Hall, though there were only three servants in a house where there had once been forty—an ancient butler and housekeeper, man and wife, and a buxom country girl, who did all the scrubbing and cleaning, attending to a small dairy, and waited upon Christabel.

The master of Old Rudderford Hall was as poor as Job in his day of affliction; or at least so ran the common rumor, amply sustained by the mode and manner of his existence. A hundred years ago there had been revelry and splendor at the grand old house, but at that time a great misfortune befell its master, in the untimely death of his eldest son, killed in a duel; and the bereaved father shut up the house, and went to France, where he lived a wild life, and squandered a noble fortune at the profligate court of Louis the Well-beloved. He died in Paris a year or so before the revolution which was to regenerate mankind, arrived at that stage in which it begun to improve them off the face of the earth; and probably by his timely decease escaped a ruder exit *viâ* the guillotine. His estate,

much impoverished, descended to a nephew, a studious young man, lame, and of feeble health, who married a girl of humble birth, lived the life of a recluse in the neglected house, and became the father of Anthony Champion, the present master of the old Hall.

It is possible that, when young Anthony inherited the estate, shrunk and burdened as it was, he might have made some effort to brighten and improve things, if fortune had favored him ever so little. But again did affliction fall upon the old house. He married a woman he adored, a fair young girl of high family but no fortune, and brought her home to the Hall, full of all manner of schemes for the future. For a little more than a year he lived a life of supreme domestic happiness, and then —two months after the birth of a baby-girl—he saw an unusual flush upon his young wife's cheek one day, and the next beheld her stricken with typhus-fever. In a week all was over, and he stood alone by his dreary hearth, like a strong man turned to stone. It was long before the caresses of his child could bring the faintest shadow of a smile to his haggard face. He seemed to grow an old man all at once. Unlike his ancestor, he did not turn his back upon the scene of his suffering; he only entombed himself there, buried alive among his books. He had inherited his father's studious habits; and after a weary year, in which he sat alone day after day, helpless, hopeless, blankly staring at the wall before him, and brooding over his misery, he grew to find some cold comfort in recondite studies of so close and severe a kind, that the more credulous among his neighbors talked of him darkly as of something not quite canny.

For such a man society could have no charm. Had he possessed the wealth of all the Rothschilds, he would have lived very much as he did live. A retinue of servants might have eaten and drunk at his expense, a vast amount of splendid upholstery might have been created at his cost; but his individual expenditure would have been no greater, his manner of existence no more cheerful. He lived alone by choice; and so utterly narrowed that his mind become by constant brooding on

one vain regret, as to make him half-unconscious that this hermit life was scarcely the best and brightest for a girl of eighteen. The motherless baby whose plaintive cries had rent his heart years ago, had blossomed into a lovely girl, painfully like his lost wife. Long and dreary as his days and nights had seemed to him ever since *that* loss, he had been scarcely conscious of the actual progress of time. The lapse might be five years or fifty. It was a surprise to him to see his daughter grown to womanhood. He woke up from a long sleep, as it were, and looked at her with vague wonder. Seven or eight years before, he had made a friendly arrangement with the rector's wife, by which Christabel was to share the studies of the four girls at the rectory, under an admirable governess; and by virtue of this arrangement his daughter's education had cost him very little money and no trouble.

He loved her fondly, and yet had given her little of his confidence. Rarely did he see the fair young face looking up at him without a faint pang, which was like the memory of an acute agony rather than actual present pain. She was so like her mother! He fancied sometimes how fair a picture those two faces would have made side by side—one developed and matronly, the other in all the bloom of girlhood.

She had her little circle of friends—a very small one. The only house she visited was the rectory, and there she came and went like a daughter of the house. There she had met the New Rudderford Hall people—Frank Greenwood and his three sisters, who fell in love with her—the sisters, that is to say—at first sight. Frank said very little about her. She declined all invitations to their parties, however—indeed, she had none of the finery required for such occasions—but consented to join them now and then on the croquet-lawn and share their afternoon tea.

CHAPTER II.

New Rudderford Hall was built upon a part of the land which King Henry bestowed upon his liege Thomas Champion,

and this fact was resented by Anthony as a personal offence against him upon the part of Mr. Greenwood. If he had been a visiting man even, nothing could have induced him to break bread with the master of the new Hall, and he always heard of his daughter's intimacy with those "Greenwood girls" with displeasure.

"I can't imagine what induces you to cultivate such people, Christabel," he said fretfully, as they were sitting together in the summer dusk after dinner one evening in the long saloon—a melancholy room which would have comfortably accommodated an assembly of fifty, and seemed very dreary in its faded splendor, occupied only by the father and daughter.

"I never have cultivated them, papa. You know how many invitations they have sent me, and I have declined them all."

"You have been to their house."

"Yes to play croquet now and then; never to any of their parties."

"I suppose that is a deprivation," said Mr. Champion, with a sigh. "I daresay there are people who would call me a cruel father, and the life you lead in this old house an unnatural one."

"Pray, pray, don't say that, my dear father," cried the girl earnestly, coming over to his chair by the open window, and laying her hand carelessly upon his shoulder. "You know that I am quite content to be with you; there is no higher happiness I could desire than that. If our lives are a little dull sometimes, and one is subject to an occasional attack of low spirits, never mind; there are other times when life seems all sunshine, and the garden and the dear old house enchanted, like the fairy palace in *Beauty and the Beast.* Why, after all, my life is quite as gay as Beauty's was. As long as you like to live alone, papa, I will be content with our solitude; though I confess it would make me happy to see you go more into the world."

The world, in Christabel's ideas meant Rudderford, and half

a-dozen houses within half-a-dozen miles of Rudderford. Perhaps the world of which she was thinking just at this moment meant even something less than that—an occasional dinner-party at Samuel Greenwood's smart stuccoed mansion.

"That is a sight you will never see, my dear," answered her father drearily. "I shut my door upon the world when I came home from your mother's funeral—home! and she was no longer there! No, Christabel; the world and I have parted company too long for any sympathy to be possible between us. A man coming out into the clamor and confusion of Paris after five-and-twenty years in one of the underground cells of the Bastille could not feel himself more a stranger than I should, if I were to go into the world now. But I am not going to keep you buried alive for ever. You have blossomed into a woman all at once, and taken me by surprise. I want a little time to think about it, and then I shall form some plan for giving you a brighter life."

"I don't wish for any change, papa. I would not leave you for the world. If you have any plan for sending me away, pray abandon it. Not all the pleasures in the world would make up to me for leaving you. Indeed, indeed, I am quite happy! I have my poor people to visit, and—and—a few friends"—she hesitated, with a sudden, blush remembering that those obnoxious Greenwoods were among the few—"and my dear old horse, Gilpin."

Mr. Champion smiled at the mention of this last item.

"Gilpin is scarcely a steed for a young lady to boast of," said he. "I suppose the world thinks that I can give you no better mount than old Gilpin; that I live the life I do from poverty as much as for any other reason."

"People may think so, papa; what does it matter?"

"Nothing, child; but for once the world is out in its reckoning. I am not a poor man. The estate was heavily burdened when I succeeded to it, but money has accumulated rapidly in the life I have led, and I have paid off everything—have saved money, too. If I could have only bought back the land upon

which the new Hall stands, and pulled down that vulgar cockney house, I should think my money worth something; but that's out of the question. Samuel Greenwood is one of the richest men in the county, and would dearly like to buy me out of this place. However, don't let's talk of him; the subject always puts me out of temper. When the time comes for your marrying, Christabel, you will not be a penniless bride."

"I hope, if ever I do marry, papa, it will be some one who won't care whether I have any money or not."

"Of course; that's a girl's notion. But people do care. I don't want you to marry a pauper who, having nothing to bestow, would be content to take you with nothing. The age has grown commercial, my dear; the more money a man has, the more he expects with his wife. And when you go into society by and by, as I intend you shall do, you shall appear as becomes a gentleman's daughter; and when you marry you shall have such jewels as not one woman in a hundred can show."

"Jewels, papa!" cried Christabel, opening her blue eyes to their widest extent—"Jewels!"

Except a white cornelian necklace and a gold heart-shaped locket containing her mother's hair, the girl had never possessed a trinket in her life.

"Yes, child, jewels. Stay here a minute, and I'll show you something."

There was a door at one end of the saloon opening into the library, that darksome den in which Anthony Champion spent his days, and which was rarely invaded by the foot of the industrious housemaid. A dingy room, lined from floor to ceiling with dingy books—books in piles on the floor, books on the mantelpiece, books heaped up on the three broad window-seats, books everywhere, and between the windows two huge carved-oak muniment chests.

Anthony left his daughter in the saloon, and went into the library. He unlocked one of these muniment chests, and took out a battered old leather-covered box, which had once been crimson. This he brought to Christabel. There was just light

enough for her to see some faded gilt lettering at top, the initials "C. C."

"Was that my mother's?" she asked, scrutinizing those two letters with interest.

"No. This jewel-case belonged to my great-aunt Caroline Champion, the mother of that unhappy lad who lost his life in a drunken brawl which ended in bloodshed. When Angus Champion turned his back upon Rudderford, he left this box behind him—forgot its existence, perhaps; who knows? His wife had been dead nine years. At any rate, although he spent almost everything he could lay his hands upon, the jewels remained in an iron safe in the steward's room, among old leases and useless parchments, and there my father found them when he inherited the property. As they had escaped so long, he did not care to sell them. 'My son's wife shall wear them,' he said. But your mother never lived to wear them, Christabel. We used to talk merrily enough of the day when she should be presented at court, in a blaze of diamonds. Yet she wore no ornaments but the roses we put in her coffin." He stopped for a few moments: *that* memory never came to him without the familiar pang. "And now I am going to dazzle your eyes," he said, putting aside the bitter thought with an effort. There are loves that do verily last a lifetime, and his was one of those.

He unlocked the jewel-case, and lifted the lid. Christabel gave a great cry of rapture. There was a tray of diamonds—necklace, bracelets, brooch, earrings, set in silver, in a solid simple style. The stones were large and brilliant, perfect in color, of a greater value than Anthony Champion imagined, though he deemed them worth a round sum.

He raised the upper tray, and revealed a lower one, full of sapphires in a quaint filigree gold setting; then he showed his daughter another tray, containing a necklace and earrings of amethysts and pearls, which Christabel declared were more beautiful than the diamonds; and then the bottom of the box, in which there were only odds and ends—antique rings, an apostle's spoon, a smelling-bottle, a couple of thimbles, a fruit-

knife, a locket, a brooch or two, and so on. But these interested Christabel almost more than the precious stones, and she sat looking them over entranced, with the three jewel-trays spread out upon the table.

"Hark!" said her father suddenly. "What was that?"

"What, papa?"

"That noise outside; it sounded like a step upon the gravel. Look out, Christabel, and see if there is any one."

Miss Champion stepped out of the long window. There was a wide gravel walk before the saloon windows, somewhat weedy and moss-grown, and beyond that a shrubbery where the young firs and shrubs grew thick and tall—a shrubbery in which a dozen men might have hidden securely enough.

There was no one to be seen. The girl glanced up and down the weedy walk, very desolate-looking in the summer twilight, and peered into the shrubbery, parting the thick laurels here and there, but without result.

"Are you sure you heard a footstep, papa?" she asked rather incredulously, as she came back to the room.

"Yes," said Mr. Champion, who had been hastily replacing the jewel-trays while his daughter was looking about. "I am sure. And there was something more than a footstep. I saw a shadow fall across the window."

"The shadow of a tree, perhaps, papa."

"There is no tree that can cast a shadow on this window. It was gone in a moment. There has been some one watching us, Christabel."

"A tramp, perhaps, papa," said Miss Champion coolly.

The approaches to Old Rudderford Hall were ill guarded—guarded not at all, in fact. The gates were never locked, and for those intruders who might find the legitimate mode of entrance inconvenient, there were numerous gaps in the fence through which they might roam into the park at will.

Plenty of tramps therefore came to the old Hall, and were wont to depart protesting against the inhospitality of the back door and kitchen department in general. There were no beer-

drinking grooms to wheedle out of a friendly pint; no gossiping scullery-maids to give them bread and cheese or broken victuals —the bone of a leg of mutton, and half a loaf of bread, or the carcasses of a pair of fowls and a dish of cold vegetables. There was nothing to be heard or seen, no hen-roosts to be robbed— for the poultry yard was a desert; only closely-shut doors, and blank iron-barred windows; weeds growing between the flag-stones in the court, an empty-dog kennel, a locked dairy, a broken pump, which would not yield the wanderer so much as the refreshment of a draught of spring water.

"A tramp!" exclaimed Mr. Champion with displeasure. "I'm afraid you encourage such vermin by your indiscriminate charities, Christabel."

Christabel looked downward with a faint little sigh. If not a miser in theory, Mr. Champion had been a miser in practice; and so restricted was her pocket-money, that these indiscriminate charities of which he complained consisted of a stray six-pence now and then bestowed upon some footsore vagrant, whose piteous tale touched the tender young heart.

"A tramp!" repeated Mr. Champion: "a pleasant thing for a tramp to have seen those jewels. I'll put them away this moment, and do you look out again, Christabel, and see if you can discover any one lurking about; and you might tell David to keep his eyes open."

David was the solitary gardener and out-of-door man, who had the custody of grounds that could have been barely kept in order by six.

Miss Champion stepped out into the garden again under a darkening sky, and this time looked more closely than before, making a circuit of the shrubbery by a path half choked with the wild growth of neglected shrubs, going round into the Dutch garden, glancing even into the kitchen garden beyond, where she found David staring pensively into a broken cucumber frame.

To him she gave her father's order, which he received almost contemptuously.

"'Tramps, miss! Lor' a mercy, they don't do no harm. There's nothing for 'em to steal."

Of course the intruder, whoever he might be, must have had ample time to make his escape after Mr. Champion first took alarm. David prowled slowly through the gardens, stared across a massive holly hedge into the park, saw no one, and wended his solitary way to the house to report accordingly.

CHAPTER III.

CHRISTABEL met Rosa Greenwood next morning in one of the green lanes beyond the village when she was returning from a long ramble on Gilpin, and that young lady told her of a croquet party that was to take place at New Rudderford Hall that evening, and to which she must certainly come.

"It's not the least bit in the world a party, you know, dear," Miss Greenwood pleaded, patting Gilpin's iron-gray shoulder; quite an impromptu affair got up for Miss Perkington, only daughter of the great firm of Perkington and Tanberry, cloth manufacturers, who is staying with us. *Such* a dear girl; not exactly pretty, but *so* interesting. We all want Frank to marry her, and I really think she likes him. But there's no knowing; young men are so peculiar."

Christabel wore a straw hat with a blue veil, and under the blue veil the roses on her cheeks deepened a little at this juncture.

"Now you must, must, must come, Christabel. I won't accept a refusal. The rectory girls are to be with us. We are to dine at five, so as to secure a long evening, and begin croquet at six; and we can wind up with a waltz or two before supper."

Christabel's eyes quite sparkled at the idea of a waltz. Dancing was a dissipation which seemed to her inexperience the height of earthly felicity. She had waltzed all by herself on the lawn many a summer evening, softly singing some languorous melody of D'Alberts as she danced.

"I should dearly like to come," she said thoughtfully, "but I don't know if papa—"

"Papa! bosh!" exclaimed Miss Greenwood, who was somewhat fast and irreverent in her notions of parental authority. "I should like to see the author of *my* being putting a spoke in the wheel if I wanted to enjoy myself. As if your life wasn't dull enough, mewed up in that dreary old Hall?" And Miss Greenwood made a wry face, which expressed her supreme contempt for the grand old Tudor mansion, as compared with the smart plate-glass-windowed habitation which sheltered her fair self.

"I'll ask papa if I may come at eight," said Christabel. "He dines at seven, you know, and he always likes to have me with him at dinner. I couldn't possibly come *till* eight; but the evenings are so long now."

"It's a great deal too late," replied Rosa, flicking a fly off Gilpin's nose. "However, if you must stop to see that curious old pa of yours eat his dinner, you must. But remember we shall expect you eight sharp. I'll send Frank to meet you at the field-gate."

"O, please don't," cried Christabel.

"But I please shall. He'll meet you at the gate when the clock strikes eight."

Miss Champion walked her horse to the end of the lane, Rosa Greenwood walking by her side, telling her about that wonderful young person, Miss Victoria Perkington, who, by virtue of her position as the only daughter of Perkington and Tanberry, had an allowance which made the condition of the rich Miss Greenwoods seem absolute penury.

"You should see the dresses she has brought with her for a ten days' visit!" exclaimed Rosa. "A basket as big as a house, and all of them from a Frenchwoman in Bruton street. There's a corded black silk trimmed with white lace—Valenciennes—three inches deep on all the flounces and puffings; worth a fortune—a perfect duck of a dress!"

Christabel thought of her jewels, and wished that she could

have melted just a few of those diamonds, which she could never wear till she was married, into silk dresses. She gave a little sigh, thinking of the scantiness of her wardrobe, and how very poor a figure she must needs seem in the eyes of Miss Perkington, and rode slowly home, meditative, and not altogether happy.

"I daresay he will marry her," she said to herself. "It is just as papa said last night. The richer people are, the more eager they are to increase their wealth. He will marry her no doubt, and buy some great estate in the neighborhood, and build a big ugly house; and I shall see them riding by on their thorough-bred horses, and laughing at poor old Gilpin."

She bent over her horse's neck to pat him at this thought, and one childish tear dropped upon the iron-gray mane. She was not much more than a child, and Frank Greenwood had been very tender and deferential in his manner to her always. It gave her a sharp pain to think that he would pass quite out of her life, and belong to Miss Perkington.

"Would you object to my going to play croquet at—at the new Hall this evening, papa?" the girl asked timidly during dinner.

"Object? Well, my dear, you know how I detest those Greenwood people"—it is doubtful if he had seen them three times in his life—"but I suppose it would be hard upon you to forbid your enjoying any little pleasure they may offer you in a quiet way. It is not a party, of course?"

"O no, papa. I only heard of it from Rosa when I was out this morning."

"Mind, I set my face absolutely against your appearance at any of their ostentatious parties. I'll not have *my* daughter paraded at Joshua Greenwood's chariot-wheels. But as far as a game of croquet goes, if it pleases you, I've no objection."

"Thanks, dear papa."

"When are you going?"

"Directly after dinner."

"That will be eight o'clock. I shall send David for you at half-past nine." Only an hour and a half! would there be

time for those waltzes on the lawn? She had danced several times with Frank at that hospitable rectory, and knew that he was an agreeable partner.

"There is to be a kind of supper, I believe, papa," she faltered.

"A kind of supper? Say ten, then, or half-past at the latest."

"Thank you, dear papa."

"Bless my heart! one would think these people were the most congenial acquaintance you could desire."

"The rectory girls are to be there, papa," Christabel said demurely.

"Well, I don't wonder at your being attached to *them.* Run away, child, and dress yourself. I can finish my dinner alone."

Miss Champion kissed her father, and tripped away to make her brief toilet; pleased, and yet with a vague pain at her heart—a pain that was associated with the image of the unknown Miss Perkington. Rosa Greenwood had called her brother "peculiar" in a tone that seemed to imply his indifference to the great heiress; but she had not said the marriage was at all unlikely; and the family wished it; and Miss Perkington was *there*; and Frank was a man of the world—very bright and clever, and open-hearted, but a man of the world nevertheless.

She put on her white muslin dress—a dress three summers old, which had been lengthened artfully, but not imperceptibly to suit her increasing height; just such a dress as must of necessity provoke contempt in the mind of Miss Perkington, who of course had never in her life worn anything lengthened or "let out." She tied a broad blue ribbon round her slim white throat, with the gold heart-shaped locket hanging to it, and then looked at herself in the glass discontentedly. It was a very beautiful picture which she saw in that old-fashioned cheval glass—a tall, slender, white-robed figure, and a fair young face framed in luxuriant auburn hair; but Christabel only saw the

deficiences in her costume, and turned away from the glass with a sigh.

Her father was dozing in his deep arm-chair when she peeped into the saloon to bid him good-bye; so she went lightly out of the window and away through the gardens, into a meadow where a solitary cow was browsing in the still evening atmosphere, and on to that field-gate of which Miss Greenwood had spoken; a gate that divided Samuel Greenwood's territory from the shrunken lands of the Champions.

Rudderford Church clock chimed the three-quarters after seven as Christabel crossed the meadow. She was just a quarter of an hour before the time appointed. She was half glad, half sorry, to think that Frank would not be there.

He was there, nevertheless—a good-looking young fellow, sitting on the gate in a contemplative attitude, thinking so profoundly, that he looked up with a start as the light footstep came close to him—a start, and something like a blush.

"How good of you to come so early!" he said, as they shook hands, and he held the little hand an extra moment or so. (It was just the sort of meeting in which a young man would consider himself entitled to one gentle pressure before he released a pretty girl's hand.) "I strolled over here ten minutes ago to have a good think. I don't often think; it's a bad habit."

Christabel laughed. She was almost always gay in his presence; he seemed to brighten her life somehow with a genial influence.

"You must have been obliged to think at Oxford," she said.

Francis Greenwood had taken honors at Oxford a year or so before.

"Not the least in the world. One's tutor does that sort of thing for one. I used to read with a man—a duodecimo edition of Porson in his way, drank like a fish and knew no end of Greek. When I came to a stiffish passage in Aristotle, I used to throw myself back in a chair and light my cigar. 'Just help yourself to another s.-and-b., and be good enough to demonstrate that proposition, old fellow, for I don't seem to see it,' I

used to say; and the dear old bloke would prose away for half an hour, and if I didn't understand it after that, I threw my book at his head and gave it up."

"Was s.–and–b. a dictionary?" Christabel asked naïvely.

"No, Miss Champion, but a wonderful enlightener of the human understanding—soda-water and brandy."

"I'm afraid you led quite a dreadful life at the University."

"Not at all, it was very nice. I should hardly mind leading it over again, only it was not so nice as——"

"As what?" Christabel asked, when he came to a dead stop.

"As the life I hope to lead by and by."

Her heart sank all at once. That meant his life in the big ugly house that he was to build for himself, and in which he was to set up as a country squire, enriched with the wealth of Perkington and Tanberry. Christabel knew that he was an ardent lover of field-sports, and all pursuits that country gentlemen affect, and that he had a vast capacity for spending money. What more natural than that he should be tempted by Miss Perkington's half-million or so?

She was silent. They had one wide meadow to cross, a meadow where the newly-cut grass was fragrant in a still June air, and they would be in the grounds of the new Hall—grounds in which there were very few trees, but a great deal of ornamentation in the way of costly shrubs of divers spikey orders, and winding gravel paths that were kept with rigorous care. They could hear the sharp clink of the croquet-balls as they crossed the meadow, and shrill feminine laughter.

"It was very rude of you to leave your side so long," said Christabel.

"My side? O, to be sure, those everlasting croquet-players. Do you know, I think croquet the most duffing—I beg your pardon, the most uninteresting game in the world. A man plays it for the sake of loafing with a girl he likes; I can't see any other attraction in it."

"I suppose you have been loafing with Miss Perkington," said Christabel, with a forced litte laugh.

Frank Greenwood looked at her curiously.

"Yes," he answered coolly, "I have been loafing with Miss Perkington a good deal lately;" and then he looked at her again.

They were at the iron gate by this time—only a light iron fence divided the grounds from the meadow. Between the lawn and the fence there was that part of the garden called, *par excellence*, a shrubbery—a scanty grove of the spikey tribe, and young pink hawthorn-trees, as thick in the trunk as a *grandin's* umbrella, and guelder-roses dotted about at intervals—a shrubbery in which there was not covert for a rabbit. Christabel felt that the eyes of all the players on the croquet-ground were upon her, as she traversed the meandering gravel walks with Frank by her side.

The lawn was as smooth and as level as a billiard-table, and there was not so much as a faded leaf among the flower-beds—brilliant pyramids of bloom, rising tier upon tier in rings of contrasting color, or waving in and out in ribbon bordering. The croquet-ground lay on one side of the house, and scattered around it there were iron seats and tables for the accommodation of loungers and lookers-on. Samuel Greenwood was sitting here, smoking his after-dinner cigar, and reading the *Times*;—a big bald-headed man, who might once have been like Frank.

He did not look particulary pleased when Christabel came to shake hands with him, smiling shyly, and he gave his son a side-glance which was not altogether agreeable.

"O, how d'ye do, Miss Champion?" he said. "I didn't know you were to be here this evening."

"Good gracious me, pa!" exclaimed the irreverent Rosa, "as if we should take the trouble to tell you who was coming to play croquet. Come, Chris, you're to be on our side—Harry and I" (short for Harriet), "Julia Lee" (the rector's daughter), "and you; Miss Perkington, Frank, Clara Lee, and Patty, on the other side. Now then, first red, get on—O, I forgot to introduce you two girls. Miss Perkington, Miss Champion; Miss Champion, Miss Perkington; aristocracy and plutocracy,

Old Rudderford Hall and the Beeches, Leamington; and now we know all about each other, and I expect you to be good friends immediately."

Miss Perkington bowed stiffly. She did not quite relish such a free-and-easy introduction, but her dear Rose had such eccentric ways. She was a tall, thin young woman, of an order that is called stylish, with a good many sharp angles, which were artfully toned down by the flouncings and puffings of a French dressmaker; a young woman with a complexion of the kind that is vulgarly called "tallowy," cold gray eyes, a short nondescript nose, and a heavy lower jaw. She had good white teeth, a profusion of black hair, and she held herself well; but it took a large amount of millinery to make Victoria Perkington attractive.

It was not altogether pleasant to Christabel, that game at croquet. In all their previous sport she had had Frank always on her side, achieving wonders by combined dexterity and dishonesty, now boldly pushing her ball to a point of vantage with the toe of his boot, anon calmy pocketing it to avoid the perils of an adversary's croquet; and they had had such fun, such perpetual giggling, such little secrets and mutual iniquities. This evening they played a rigorous game. Miss Perkington belonged to a croquet-club at Leamington, and would stand no nonsense. She played two hours every afternoon throughout the croquet season, just as regularly as she practised Czerny's exercises on the piano two hours every morning. She had a stroke like a sledge-hammer, and never missed a hoop; so she very soon became a rover, and in that capacity kept a sharp eye upon her ally Mr. Francis Greenwood. He had not the smallest opportunity for talking to Christabel, even if he had wished to do so, and poor Christabel fancied that he did not wish. He seemed to be upon quite confidential terms with Miss Perkington. He was in fact a young man who could hardly help making himself agreeable to women, and had that semi-flirting manner which some young men cultivate.

Miss Champion played abominably; suffered herself to be

croqueted off the face of the earth, as it were, to the extreme indignation of Rosa Greenwood. The Perkington side won with flying colors. O, how poor Christabel hated the eau-de-Nil dress, with its innumerable flounces and frillings, the point-lace collar, the Cluny borderings, and all the Perkington comparisons, as that sole daughter of the house of Perkington and Tanberry kept rustling to and fro, sending adverse balls to the farthest limits of space with a cold-blooded ferocity that set Miss Champion's teeth on edge!

When the second game had finished, with dire defeat for Christabel's party, and it was about as dark as ever it is at midsummer, with the stars shining out one by one from a deep blue sky, Rosa and one of those useful rectory girls went into the drawing-room and played the famous "Mabel" waltzes. The piano had been wheeled into the bay, and the music floated out through the three tall windows, open from floor to ceiling.

Two of the girls waltzed together, and Frank was still Victoria Perkington's partner. He had scarcely asked her to dance: she had appropriated him as a matter of course.

"If I *am* to dance, I suppose it is to be with you," she said, with her little supercilious laugh, "since you are our only *danseur*."

She waltzed very well, with all her canvas spread; waltzed too well, Francis Greenwood thought, for he was waiting for her to be done up, in order that he might get just a turn or so with Christabel. She gave him no opportunity for this, however, as she contrived to hold him in conversation—*fade* society talk about people they both knew at Leamington; but O, it sounded so confidential, so tender even, to Christabel's listening ears!—during the pauses in which Miss Perkington condescended to rest, and then went off again like a steam-engine refreshed.

When Frank did at last make his escape, and cross the lawn in quest of Christabel, a shrill voice from the bay-window called out "Supper!" and he was obliged to abandon all hope of that longed-for waltz.

He offered Miss Champion one arm, and gave the other to one of the rectory girls. These were visitors for the evening, and Miss Perkington was staying in the house, and was, in a manner, a member of the family. The fair Victoria rewarded him with a very black look, notwithstanding, when they all came crowding into the brilliantly-lighted dining-room, where Samuel Greenwood sat at the head of his table with an Aberdeen salmon *à la mayonnaise* before him, a huge silvery fish lying in a bed of greenery, with a bristling body-guard of prawns.

"Come here, Victoria, my dear," he said, pointing to the chair on his right; "Frank, you'll sit next to Miss Perkington; Miss Lee, you come on my left."

He took no notice of Christabel; but that contumacious Frank put her coolly into the chair next his own, and so seated himself between Miss Perkington and her rival.

The heiress of Perkington and Tanberry retired into herself. Frank tried to divide his attention between the two girls; but Miss Perkington only answered him with icy monosyllables, and pretended to consider all his attempts at general conversation directed *solely* to Christabel. She scarcely touched her salmon, declined lobster salad, would have nothing to say to cold chicken or pine-apple cream, left the moselle to waste its fragrance on the desert air, and sat trifling moodily with half-a-dozen monster strawberries.

Her ill-temper seemed to communicate itself to Mr. Greenwood, senior, who looked daggers at his son from time to time. The other girls were uneasy. Christabel, who had brightened and sparkled into new life at the beginning of the feast, found out suddenly, in the midst of an animated little discussion, that she and Frank were the only talkers, and grew silent immediately.

The great ormolu and malachite clock upon the chimney-piece struck the half-hour after ten.

"O, if you please," she whispered to Frank, "I ought to go away directly, if Mr. Greenwood would not think me rude.

David was to come for me at half-past ten—the gardener, you know—and papa might be angry if I were to stay later."

"David is a nuisance," said Frank, in his free-and-easy manner; "though our society is not so entertaining that you need regret leaving it. I shall see you home, of course."

"O no, pray don't think of that; there's really no occasion."

"There is occasion. You might meet a gang of poachers poaching eggs, or something, and what would David be among so many? There's that fellow they call Black Simeon—the man who got seven years for a burglary at Little Thorpington—has come back to Rudderford. I saw him prowling about the village yesterday, half-seas-over. A regular bad lot that fellow is. Of course I shall come with you. David can walk behind and contemplate the stars. I daresay he knows Orion and the Pleiades as well as that fellow in *Locksley Hall*, whose knowledge of the heavenly bodies doesn't seem to have been stupendous.

The advent of the indoor man from the Rectory, to fetch the Miss Lees, was announced at this moment, so the girls all rose together. A maid who had spirited away Christabel's hat, brought it back; and after a very cool good night from Joshua Greenwood, who sat scowling at the mutilated salmon, and the stiffest possible bow from Miss Perkington, Miss Champion departed, with Frank for her escort.

"Miss Champion has a servant, I believe, Frank," Mr. Greenwood said, sternly.

"I know she has," answered his undutiful son; "but I'm going to see her safe across the meadows for all that."

Oxford was always too much for Birmingham in any encounter between those two. The commercial magnate had spent three or four thousand pounds upon his son's education, and it seemed to him at odd times that the only tangible produce of that investment was an extensive vocabulary of university slang, and an agreeable placidity of manner which set paternal authority at naught. The young man was not altogether an undutiful son, however, and owned occasionally that his father wasn't "half a bad fellow."

CHAPTER IV.

THE moon had risen while they were losing the calm sweetness of the night in the gaslit dining-room; the bright full summer moon had risen, and all the spikey trees in the shrubbery were reflected on the smooth grass as if on water, all the flowers in the garden were breathing perfume. Frank and Christabel went out by the drawing-room window, and forgot all about David, who came running after them by and by from the servants'-hall, where he had been regaled with beer, and questioned artfully about the "queer ways," of his master. He had to come round by back ways and obscure paths, the gardens being sacred from such vulgar feet as his, and thus did not overtake those two till they were half across the first meadow. And yet they had dawdled a good deal in the garden, Frank insisting upon picking an especial yellow rose from a standard of his own planting for Christabel.

"You must have one; roses always smell sweeter picked by moonlight," he said. "If you don't find the fact stated in Linnæus, it isn't my fault."

David was a judicious young man. He followed at a respectful distance, and, as Frank had suggested, contemplated, or seemed to contemplate, the sidereal heavens, chewing a twig of hawthorn thoughtfully the while. He allowed an ample margin for loitering at gates; gave Frank so much latitude, in fact, that before they came to the thick wood which made a darkness round Old Rudderford Hall, that undutiful son had asked Christabel to be his wife. Of course he had set out with no such intention; but the moonlight, and the dewy meadows fragrant with new-mown hay, and that judicious David, and a tender sweetness in Christabel's blue eyes, had been too much for him, and the words had come of their own accord somehow, he hardly knew how.

Was he sorry when she looked up at him with those sweet eyes brimming over with happy tears, and murmured shyly,

"I thought you were going to marry Miss Perkington!"

"Not for millions of millions, darling!" he cried, not sorry, but rapturously glad, clasping the slender figure to his breast, and raining down kisses on her fair young face.

David drew near at this juncture, still intent upon astronomical study, but with the air of thinking he might be wanted presently.

Frank took the hint, released the trembling girl, quite confounded by surprise and joy, and put a little hand through his arm with the calmest air of appropriation.

"It's all settled, darling," he said; "I shall call upon your father to-morrow."

"O Mr. Greenwood!"

"Mr. Greenwood! If you say that again, I shall kiss you again, in spite of David."

"Frank, then."

How sweet it was to say it! how sweet it was to hear it!—sweetness known to youth only, that loves and is beloved for the first time. After six or seven such experiences, that sort of thing is apt to become commonplace. It is like one's first watch, one's first Derby-day, one's first whitebait dinner.

"I'm sure your father will never let you marry me, Frank," said Christabel.

"I should like to see myself asking my governor's permission," replied the young man. "He ought to be proud of my getting such a chance—marrying a girl of a grand old family like yours; Brummagem allying itself to the Middle Ages; counting-house getting a leaf in Burke's *County Families*."

"But we are so poor," remonstrated Christabel. "At least——"

"A lift in the social scale is better than money, my dearest. I can take out letters-patent and call myself Greenwood-Champion by and by. That would look rather nice upon our pasteboards, wouldn't it, Belle?"

They were in the deep shadow of the trees by this time. Not a glimmer of light was visible in the old house. All the lower windows were closely guarded by heavy oak shutters.

They went to a little door—not the principal entrance, but a low arched door in a side tower—and David rang a bell, which made a tremendous clanging half-a-mile away, as it seemed. They had to wait a considerable time before any one answered this summons, very much to Frank's satisfaction. He was whispering schemes about their future life into Christabel's ear, just as if they had been engaged a twelvemonth; while David looked up at the dark ivy-colored walls, as if calculating the sparrows' nests.

Some one came at last—much too soon for Francis Greenwood. Slipshod feet shuffled along a stone passage, uncertain hands fumbled with locks and bolts, and the door being opened cautiously, revealed the ancient butler in a semi-somnambulistic condition.

"Lard, but you be late, Miss Chrissy," he said—he had helped to nurse her in her motherless babyhood. "Your pa's gone to bed ever so long."

"I'm glad of that," Christabel whispered to her lover.

"Why, sweetest?"

"Because I never *could* have told him; and if he had seen my face, he might have found out——"

"He shall hear all about it to-morrow, darling. I shall call at one o'clock."

"And I shall ride Gilpin away to the other end of the world. I couldn't bear to be in the house while—while——"

"While I am in the dock," said the young man, laughing. "I think the verdict will be a favorable one, Chrissy."

"O, you don't know," cried Christabel dolefully.

"I don't know what, dear?"

"How prejudiced papa is against your family, because of the new Hall being built upon land that once belonged to this, and the estate having been cut up and spoiled so, to make your grounds. Those meadows of yours were a part of our park once."

"That isn't our fault, darling, but that improvident old Champion's. Who knows but what the two estates might be

joined somehow one of these days? My father could buy himself another place; and we'd cut off the new Hall with the smallest possible allowance of garden, and restore this dear old barn"—so lightly did young Oxford speak of a perfect specimen of Tudor architecture—"to its original splendor."

The sleepy butler coughed faintly, as if to remind them of his infirmities and the lateness of the hour. It was nearly midnight by this time—that walk across the fields had lasted so long. The lovers clasped hands, and said good-night; and Frank would fain have made his last good-night a long business, only there was the butler with his guttering tallow candle and his piteous expostulating look, and David in the rear yawning audibly. So with one warm pressure of the little hand he let her go, and the stout old door closed upon her, like the jaws of a monster that had just swallowed her up.

Francis Greenwood turned away with a sigh, putting his hand in his waistcoat pocket mechanically to give David baksheesh. But David had vanished, and the court-yard was empty. He looked about meditatively, in no humor to go back to the common world just yet. The wind was sighing faintly among the ivy-leaves, with a sound scarce louder than the breathing of a quiet sleeper; the black wall of the old house rose high above him, the shadow of it fell upon him like a pall.

"What a dismal place for my pet to live in!" he said to himself, and then began to wonder which was her room, and to watch for the glimmer of a light from one of those upper casements.

It came presently; a feeble twinkle, which flitted along a corridor, shining faintly from a row of narrow windows, and then stopped and grew steady in a window at the end of the house. This was his darling's chamber, the young man thought rapturously. It might have been the butler's, but fortunately was not; that functionary, who might have had his pick of twenty vacant rooms, preferring to inhabit a darksome den in the steep sloping roof, where he burrowed like a rabbit. It really was Christabel's room.

Rudderford church clock struck twelve while the lover still stood gazing, and at that very moment, as if conjured into being by the last stroke of the mystic hour, the figure of a man came suddenly from behind an angle of the wall.

"Who the deuce are you?" cried Frank, darting forward.

But the figure had vanished. There was a labyrinth of outbuildings on that side of the house. Frank followed, and prowled round about them, peering into every corner, but could find no trace of that midnight intruder. There is always a nook into which that sort of gentry can screw itself. His search was so close and thorough, that he began at last to fancy his own senses must have deceived him, and that the figure had been only a creature of his imagination. He was not easily satisfied, however. The jewel in that old Tudor casket was to his mind so rare a gem, that no care or watchfulness could be too much in him, whose privilege it was to guard it. He made a complete circuit of the house, trying windows and shutters. On the lower story all was secure as the casements of a beleaguered fortress, close guarded from the foe. If Anthony Champion had been the owner of hoarded millions, he could scarcely have protected himself better from possible burglars.

One o'clock struck before Frank Greenwood left the precincts of the old Hall, and walked slowly away towards the meadows.

CHAPTER V.

CHRISTABEL was almost too happy after that midnight parting. There was no depressing influence to-night in the gloom and silence of her ancient home. All the burden of her loneliness, which she had borne so meekly, was lifted away in a moment, and her future life lay radiant before her, like a garden in fairy-land. She was a little anxious about her father and his strong prejudices against the race of Greenwood; but her lover appeared to her altogether so fascinating and irresistible, that she could not imagine anybody proof against his influence. Her

father would like and admire him, of course, just as she did, and would abandon all his prejudices, and accept him as her lover. And Miss Perkington; Christabel laughed aloud—a little happy laugh that startled the silence of the whole room—at the thought of that young lady's ignominious defeat; all the silk flounces and lace frillings counting for nothing in the eyes of true love.

She was much too happy to think of sleep for ever so long, although it was past midnight, but paced the room with her hands clasped in a joyous reverie, thinking of the wondrous fortune that had befallen her. Only a retired manufacturer's son, it is true; but then she loved him, and he seemed to her the one most perfect creature in all the world—so bright, so generous, so brave, so true. She had known so few people, had lived a life so utterly lonely, that it is scarcely strange she should believe in the one sunny-natured young fellow who had praised and loved her.

Here she stopped before the tall narrow old glass, and looked at herself half wonderingly. Was she really pretty? was she worthy of such a lover? She shook out her long loose hair. Yes; she was like a picture of Patient Grisel she remembered seeing years ago in a famous collection.

The clock struck one before she lay down; and then, overcome suddenly by sleep in the midst of her happy thoughts, she threw herself down, dressed as she was, upon a sofa, to rest a little before going seriously to bed; and thereupon fell into a deep slumber, which seemed likely to last all night.

She had one bad habit, engendered perhaps of long lonely days, with much time for thoughtfulness and waking dreams—the habit of walking in her sleep. It was not a thing that happened to her often, but once in a way—two or three times in a year, perhaps, when her mind had been in any way disturbed during the day—she had been wont to wander. The servants had met her at daybreak, sometimes in the corridor, or out on the broad square landing beyond, or on the stairs even, descending ghost-like, with open unseeing eyes. One luckless country

lass, taking her for the ghost of that slaughtered lady whose spirit was reported to haunt the Hall, had fled shrieking to the kitchen, where she fell into violent hysterics, clutching the air, and well-nigh strangling herself with her sobs and screams.

And so it happened to-night. Towards three o'clock, just as the moon was waning, the girl rose from her sofa, pushed open the door which she had left ajar, and went out into the corridor —a tall white figure faintly visible in the dim light.

She went straight to an angle of the corridor where there was a narrow window cut in a part of the wall where the ivy grew thickest. As she came slowly forward, this window was opened by a stealthy hand, and a man thrust his head and shoulders through the window.

He was on the point of leaping through, when his eyes—evil eyes they were, too—fell upon that mysterious figure, with the white dress and loose flowing hair, the figure he had heard of many a time, when folks talked of the ghost that haunted Old Rudderford Hall. He dropped his stick with an ejaculation. The fall of the jagged stake, cut from a hedge and trimmed with a hasty hand, upon the uncarpeted oak floor, awakened Christabel. She gave a loud shriek, and stared at the intruder transfixed. That shriek was alarming enough; but it reassured him. He sprang into the corridor, and clapped his great horny hand upon her mouth.

"What, it's you, is it?" he exclaimed in a cautious voice. "Hold your row; or I shall have to quiet you with my clasp-knife. What brings you prowling about at this time of night, I wonder? After that chap that was prowling outside about an hour ago, I suppose. Come, young lady, you just walk into your own room, and keep yourself to yourself; I've got business to do here."

He had tied a big bird's-eye handkerchief across the girl's mouth—she was not fully awake yet, and had only a confused sense of peril and horror—and had just produced another, with a view to tying it round her wrists, when a great crash of glass sounded close behind him, and Frank Greenwood sprang

through the open window, smashing the casement as he came through.

Love is so foolish, so full of morbid doubts and apprehensions. He had come back to the old Hall, after crossing the meadows on his way home, not able to feel comfortable about that lurking figure which he had seen at midnight, and had come back just in time to rescue his betrothed from the clutch of a ruffian, and to save the Champion diamonds,—a very valuable portion of his future wife's dowry.

The man was Black Simeon the poacher. He had been lurking about the night before, when Mr. Champion showed his daughter the family jewels, had seen the gems and where they were kept, and had hidden himself in the shrubbery when Christabel came out to reconnoitre. To-night he had tried all the lower doors and windows, and finding entrance below impossible, had clambered up the ivy to this casement at the end of the corridor, trusting to his good luck to grope his way down stairs to the library.

The intent but not the deed confounded him. He was pinioned and locked in an empty wine-cellar that night, and handed over to the local authorities at breakfast-time, to appear by and by, charged with a burglarious attempt, and to return to that state of bondage from which he had so lately emerged.

Anthony Champion could hardly be uncivil to the man who had saved his daughter and the family diamonds; and Frank Greenwood really was a nice young fellow, with free-and-easy, irresistible ways. He brought brightness and life into the gloomy old house, and in an incredibly short time persuaded the master of Old Rudderford Hall to waive his prejudices against the inmates of New Rudderford Hall.

When he had smoothed the way by his artful management, he coolly ordered his father to call upon Mr. Champion, to entreat that gentleman's consent to the union of the two houses. The manufacturer was furious, and there was a scene; but a very brief one. Frank's supreme coolness made light of everything. Miss Perkington had departed before this in silent dis-

gust, with all her baggage. Samuel Greenwood was fain to give way; it evidently mattered so very little to his son whether he did or not.

"I can always make a living at the Bar," said young Oxford, in his careless way, and there's the five hundred a year my poor mother left me. I should like to have made an amicable arrangement, and secured your coöperation for restoring the old Hall; but if it isn't to be, why it isn't; you know best; and we sha'n't starve."

Samuel fretted and fumed, swore an oath or two, and succumbed. He went to call upon Mr. Champion with lamb-like meekness, and returned crestfallen.

Mr. Champion was prepared to waive all consideration of the wide difference between the status of the two families, and to consent to the marriage. He could give his daughter fifty thousand pounds and jewels worth at least twenty-five thousand more. Mr. Greenwood had supposed him to be a pauper.

"It has been my fancy to live like this," he said, "and allow the surplus of my income to accumulate for my only child."

And so they were married, and were just the sort of couple to live happily ever afterwards.

HUGH DAMER'S LAST LEGER.

CHAPTER I.

"Tricks he hath had in him which gentlemen have."

DON'T suppose there are many people nowadays who remember Hugh Damer. Not that I would imply that he existed at a period beyond the memory of middle-aged mankind. The time that I am writing of is barely fifteen years old. But the memories of men are short, and every decade sees the rise and fall of new heroes. The career of a man of the world is not much longer than the reign of those later Cæsars who were polished off so quickly in the days when Rome was going down hill and the Roman Empire a nice little lot to be put up to auction. Picture to yourself, says De Quincy, any man going home to dinner with *that* little lot in his pocket!

So I say, advisedly, that perhaps there are few nowadays who care to remember the brief summer-time of Hugh Damer's life; and yet he was a great man in his time—that is to say, great in certain circles—and made his mark after a certain fashion.

We were contemporaries at Oxford, but not of the same college. I was a Baliol man, Damer was at Christchurch, but we were fast friends notwithstanding. I think Hugh indulged freely in every kind of dissipation fashionable at that period; but he never got into any vulgar scrapes—no painting

chapel doors a bright scarlet, or nailing up an obnoxious don's oak, or anything of that kind; and in spite of wine parties without number, hunting all through the season, not a little high play late of nights "under the rose," and various other amusements of a somewhat uproarious order, Hugh contrived to distinguish himself in athletics, and to take his degree in a very creditable manner. When or how he read no one could ever discover, but it was said that he could do without sleep for a fortnight at a time, and that very often, after shutting his door upon his friends at two A.M., he would tie a wet towel round his head and go in for divinity till early chapel, where he made his appearance fresh as a rose after his matutinal shower-bath.

He was blessed with a superb constitution, and a marvellous capacity for work or pleasure. He was, indeed, a man who could scarcely help living hard and fast—a man to whom any monotonous or sluggish form of existence would have been simply unendurable. In appearance he was a splendid fellow—tall, broad-shouldered, blue-eyed, and chestnut-haired, with a sunny look in his face that was, for most people, irresistible. He had the air of a man who must needs command fortune—win the race of life in a canter—indeed, it was almost impossible to associate the idea of trouble or sorrow of any kind with Hugh Damer.

After leaving Oxford I lost sight of my friend for some years. I went to the bar, and my own life was a great deal too busy for the perpetual frivolities of the fashionable world. I saw nothing of Hugh, but I heard of him—heard of him as one of the most distinguished among the gilded youth of that day. He was of a good old Yorkshire family, and had a large fortune, which, according to the reports of his friends, had come to him unfettered at his majority. People told me that he was spending this royally, and, at the rate he was living, could not be expected to hold out long.

"He's a capital fellow—a first-rate fellow," one of these prudent observers said to me, "but there never was much stay in

him. He does everything too fast—runs away with the race for the first half mile, and comes in nowhere at the finish. People are afraid of him, somehow. He might have doubled his fortune by a brilliant marriage more than once; but he lost his chance, wrecked himself by some mad folly that no man but he would have dreamt of. He's a dangerous fellow, and women feel it, and can't bring themselves to trust him."

Thus argued our common friend, with a serious countenance, and a deprecatory elevation of the shoulders. I was sorry to hear such an opinion of Damer, for I liked him with all my heart, and had hoped in a brilliant future for him.

It was not very long after this, just at the close of the London season, when I came across my old friend quite unexpectedly at a West End club of which I was a member, but whose gorgeous saloons my shadow rarely darkened. I was a busy man, and a prosperous withal, my prosperity entirely dependent upon unremitting industry.

A late August twilight was closing in, and the lamps were glimmering here and there in the shadowy streets. The fashionable quarter of the town had a dreary look, the great rooms of the club a palpable air of desolation.

I went into the reading-room; there was only one man there, and he rose from one of the luxurious arm-chairs, and threw down a periodical with an audible groan as I entered. Suddenly he started, stared at me with all his might, and came striding across the room to me, and in the next moment both my hands were in the muscular grip of Hugh Damer.

"My dear Norris, my dear old friend," he cried, in his loud hearty way, "I am so rejoiced to see you—so glad, upon my soul, now—I can't tell you how glad. I have been wishing to come across you for the last half-dozen years."

"And yet you knew where to find me all the time, Hugh; and the Temple, if remote from the civilized regions of the West, is not a pilgrimage utterly beyond the capacity of friendship."

"Hit away, old chap. I deserve the reproach. But, you see,

I knew you were always busy—heard of you from every one as devoted to your profession, a perfect slave to it, in fact; and I am such an idle beggar, what could I do but bore you if I came? And then one's life goes so fast, somehow. I declare to you, Fred, I have seldom had an hour that I could call my own since I left Oxford. I seem to have existed in a whirlpool, an actual maëlstrom spinning me round and round and sucking me down in spite of myself. And now, tell me all your news, dear boy; what you have been doing, and what you are going to do, and all the rest of it."

We sat down opposite each other at a little table in one of the windows, and by the faint gray light of the fading day I saw that my friend was not looking by any means as well as I should have wished to see him look. The handsome face was wan and haggard, and there were lines about the eyes and mouth that should scarcely have appeared in so young a countenance.

"I'm afraid you've been ill, Hugh," I said to him by and by. "You seem to have lost that perennial bloom for which you were renowned at Oxford."

"Ill! O no," he answered carelessly. "I've not been ill—worried a little occasionally, that's all. But now listen to me, Fred, old fellow, and if you wish to preserve my regard you must fall into my way of thinking; and I assure you that regard of mine is a very deep feeling, though it's rather backward in showing itself. Now, you own to having a clear fortnight before you after the last of this month, in which you may kick up your heels and dispose of yourself as it seems fit to you, without let or hinderance to your prospects of wearing silk by and by. And you talk of devoting your leisure to certain nameless cads of your acquaintance—of the genus swell, I suppose—who have got a moor down somewhere in the north, and want you to go and assist them in the murder of innocent grouse. Throw over the unknown cads, dear old boy, and come down to me. September is a great time for us Yorkshire men. I can give you no end of partridges, and my place is only fifteen miles

from Doncaster. Come to Churleigh Wood, Fred, and spend your holiday with an old friend. I shall consider it an especial favor if you say 'Yes'—and—and it may be the last time I shall be able to ask you."

"What do you mean by that, Hugh?" I demanded, alarmed by the sudden gravity of his tone.

"Never mind what I mean, Fred. Life is full of changes. The present is all a man can call his own, and so, *Carpe diem.* Come, dear boy, is it to be yes or no?"

"I should be a churl if I said 'No,' when you flatter me by seeming really anxious to have me," I answered; "so the gentlemen unknown, who are really very good fellows in their way, shall go overboard, and I'll inflict my society upon you for the first fortnight in September. Shall you be alone at Churleigh?"

"Alone?" He laughed at the absurdity of the notion, and I was very glad to hear the old frank laugh again. "Alone, Fred! why, I have never been alone in my own house since I became master of it. We're sure of a houseful; some nice people, of course, and perhaps a few nasty ones—but you'll put up with the bores for the sake of friendship."

"I am not afraid of meeting bores at Churleigh," I answered. "There is not much affinity between you and that species, I think, Damer."

"There is one of my guests I fancy you will like," he said musingly, and with a tender smile lighting up his haggard face.

"A lady, Hugh. Your face tells me that."

"Yes, a lady; but I will say no more till you have seen her."

We parted soon after this, I promising to be with my friend on the 1st. He had occasion to go down to the old place some days earlier, in order to be ready for possible arrivals.

CHAPTER II.

"What's to be thought of him? Does the rumor hold for true that he's so full of gold?"

THE weather was lovely, the country looking very fair in the subdued glory of early autumn, as the express rattled me down

to Doncaster. Here a dog-cart and fast-trotting roan waited to convey me to Churleigh, where I arrived just in time to hear the dressing-bell ring out cheerily from an open bell-tower, after an hour and a half's spin through a rich pastoral country.

The house was an old one, a sombre red-brick pile of masonry of the Tudor period, with a wide moat, where carp and dace flashed through the deep dusky water under the shadow of great yews; a rare old-fashioned place, with noble gardens set in a wide expanse of level meadow-land, that might have been fairly called a park. Within, the dark oak panelling and ponderous furniture, quaint old cabinets and bureaus, buffets and chests of carved ebony and chestnut wood, oak, and walnut, had a delightful old-world aspect. There were rare old tapestries, too, silk-embroidered hangings, chairs and sofas in ancient worsted work, which testified to the industry of past generations of feminine Damers. Everything bore the fashion of an age that was gone, and there was a sombre charm about the place which was, to my mind, perfect in its way.

I told Hugh how much I liked his birthplace, and praised the taste which had preserved its original character. He sighed heavily as he answered me—"Yes," he said moodily, "it's a dear old place, and I am weak enough to love it. I can remember sitting at my mother's feet in some of these old rooms, or on her knees with her arms round me, many a quiet twilight when my father was away in London. There was a great love between us two, and nothing that she cared for has been touched since she died. Her favorite flowers still grow in the garden—homely old-fashioned flowers, that my gardeners would like to do away with—though it is fifteen years since her hand gathered one of them. Yes, I have need to love Churleigh, Fred, God forgive me!"

His tone alarmed me, there was such a depth of bitterness and self-reproach in his utterance of those last words.

"Hugh," I said eagerly, "there is something wrong with you. I am sure of it. I saw the change in your face that night we met at the club. Why don't you trust me, dear boy?

You call me your friend. Tell me the worst, Hugh. What is it that has gone wrong?"

"Everything," he answered with a groan. "It's the old story, Fred; the old story of the rake's progress. Only a modern version, you know, with a little less vice than there is in Hogarth's renowned panorama, but every whit as much folly. Yes, Fred, congratulate me upon my fair old home—the roof-tree that has sheltered my race for a dozen generations—the house my mother loved. Give me joy of a birthplace which an English gentleman may be fairly proud to call his own. The man who sweeps the crossing at the corner of Pall-mall has about as much right to call himself master of Churleigh as I have. It is all a miserable *simulacrum*, Fred; a mockery and a delusion. I don't say that the footmen and grooms are bailiffs in disguise, but they might as well be that. It would make the case no worse."

"Then you are ruined, Hugh?"

"Irretrievably."

"In Heaven's name, how has it all gone—your fortune? It was a large one, wasn't it?"

"A very fair inheritance, though my father was somewhat wild in his day, and spent a good deal. How has it gone, Fred? Who knows? I, the least of all mortal men. It has gone—*somehow*. I have lived much too fast to count the cost of life. I don't think there has been much wasted on actual vice, unless you call gambling vicious; but it has all gone. I drove a four-in-hand for two or three seasons, and that kind of thing leads to a good deal of outlay in the way of Richmond dinners and diamond bracelets—there are some people you can scarcely ask to dinner without introducing a diamond bracelet as an element of the dessert—and I have had a weakness for steam-yachts: but those are minor details. I have enjoyed a curious sequence of ill-luck upon the Turf for the last two years. *That* may have something to do with it."

"I should think it rather likely," I answered hopelessly.

"But is there no chance of redemption, Hugh? A rich marriage, for instance?"

"No, Fred, I am not base enough for that. I couldn't offer my ruined fortunes to a rich woman. I couldn't sink to the position of a dependent on my wife. If I were in love with a penniless girl, I wouldn't mind asking her to share my poverty. There is always something that a man can do. I might emigrate and devote my energies to cattle-breeding far away in the bush. Unhappily, the only woman I care for is burdened with a large fortune—a fortune that must needs make an impassable barrier between herself and me."

"But, my dear boy, this is quixotic folly. If the lady cares for you, why should you not redeem your fortunes by means of her wealth? It is a woman's proudest privilege to make that kind of sacrifice."

"And a man's deepest degradation to accept it. No, Fred, it can't be done. Beyond which, even were I sordid enough to desire such a thing, the lady is not her own mistress. She has a father, who would never forgive her for an imprudent marriage. No, Fred, I am done for—bar one remote contingency."

"And what is that?" I asked anxiously.

"The success of my book for the Leger week. I stand to win something enormous—something that would set me up on my legs again—give me a fresh start in life, in short. With that sum at my command, I could pay off my most pressing engagements, clear this place of its mortgages, and, with a few years of retirement and economy, drift back into a very comfortable income. In that case I shall not fear to ask Laura Dashwood to be my wife."

"Laura Dashwood! A very charming name."

"Yes, and a still more charming girl. However, you will see her to-morrow. She is only a manufacturer's daughter, I must tell you. George Dashwood is a self-made man—one of the richest men in Yorkshire, and a trifle pompous on the score of his money or his success. But he is not a bad fellow by any means. And Laura is the dearest girl in England to my mind."

"Of course. An only daughter, I presume?"

"An only child. I wish with all my heart she had half a score of brothers and sisters. But I suppose we'd better get back to the others now, old fellow."

It was late on the evening of my arrival. Lights were shining from a score of open windows, and the mingled sounds of music and laughter rang out upon the tranquil September night. Damer and I had wandered away from the house when the men left the dining-room, and had enjoyed this confidential talk as we strolled with our cigars on the broad gravel walk by the side of the moat.

The house was almost full already. There was a Belgravian matron with two pretty stylish-looking daughters, and a stately husband who was a baronet and a member of Parliament, devoted to the Conservative interest, and seldom opening his mouth in a conversational way except to talk politics. There were a good many young men, all more or less of the Turf, turfy; and there was a country matron, with three rosy-cheeked daughters devoted to croquet. There were a clergyman and his wife, from the neighborhood—very pleasant people, with nothing stilted or unduly professional about them, both vicar and vicar's wife past-masters of loose croquet, the vicar playing a severely mathematical game; and there was a young squire of sporting tendencies, whose estate lay some forty miles off, and whose income was said to be something like fifteen thousand a year—a frank blue-eyed young man, with a predilection for gorgeous neckties and a loud jolly laugh.

The Dashwoods were to arrive early next day. I heard the country people speak of them once or twice in the course of the evening with that languid tone of indulgence with which it is the fashion to talk of those who are received into a world that fancies itself above them.

"The Dashwoods visit a great deal," Mrs. Melton, the country matron, said to me. "They are received everywhere, though I believe he began life quite as a working man. And people really like them. Mr. Dashwood is very fond of society,

and entertains people at his own place in a most sumptuous manner. I have never been there myself, but some people like that kind of thing. Rather a florid style of hospitality, you know. These newly rich people are apt to err in that direction."

CHAPTER III.

"Fair as a star, when only one
Is shining in the sky."

I WAS curious to see Miss Dashwood after what Hugh had told me, and was really concerned about my friend's difficulties. The book for the Leger did not inspire me with much hope, for I had a rooted abhorrence of the Turf. But I did hope something from Damer's attachment to Miss Dashwood, and I thought my friend's fortune might be mended by such a marriage, without derogation to his honor. If the lady had wealth, Hugh had at least a good old name wherewith to endow her, and a position in the country which much needs be a considerable elevation for the manufacturer's daughter. It did not seem to me that the alliance would be an unequal one.

I was on the terrace, in front of the house when the Dashwoods arrived at noon the next day, and I saw the young lady alight from her carriage. She was very pretty, very graceful and elegant, too, manufacturer's daughter though she was. She was fair, with a radiant bloom, and the loveliest blue eyes I ever beheld; not gray, or any one of those numerous vague tints which pass for blue, but real azure—the perfect blue of a summer sky or a forget-me-not flower. Nor was their color the greatest charm of Miss Dashwood's eyes. *That* lay in their expression—the innocent, girlish trustfulness, the sunny brightness of eyes that had never tried to hide or simulate an emotion. She was very young—eighteen, I should say at most—and had a bewitching youthfulness and freshness of manner. I did not wonder that Hugh Damer loved her.

They came along the terrace, Miss Dashwood leaning on her

father's arm, Hugh walking by her side. It was their first visit to Churleigh, and the manufacturer was eager to explore the house and grounds. Hugh lost no time in presenting me to his friends, and I accompanied them round the blooming gardens, where all the bright early autumn flowers grew luxuriantly; and through the ancient panelled rooms, and corridors and galleries lined with dingy old pictures.

Mr. Dashwood appeared delighted with everything he saw, and exhibited no small amount of intelligence and good taste.

"Now, this is a kind of thing I like," he said heartily; "this is something like a house. A man can fancy this a home. That's the worst of a new place; let a man spend what money he will upon it, it looks only so much bricks and timber. Money won't buy the home look, and no architect knows how to give it. Now, there's my house at Dedham—a very fine house in its way, I daresay, and so it ought to be, considering what it has cost me; but at its best it looks like a public institution; and I have no doubt strangers who see it from the train put it down for an asylum for idiots or lunatics, or something of that kind. It is cold, and stony, and cheerless somehow, though it's warmed with hot water pipes from garret to cellar, and there isn't a modern invention in the way of comfort or luxury that has been omitted. Yet the place gives me the shivers whenever Laura and I happen to be alone there; and I'm never comfortable unless we've got a houseful of people. Now I could live in a corner of this place, and feel myself snug and cosy. There's that cedar-wood parlor, for instance, with the blue-tiled fireplace; a man might spend his life there."

"You really like Churleigh, then, Mr. Dashwood?" said Hugh, smiling a little at the manufacturer's enthusiasm, but not with a joyous smile.

"Like it! I should think I do, indeed. If there were only such a place as this in the market, Dedham Park would soon be to let on lease."

"You may have Churleigh, itself, if you like," Hugh said

with an indifferent air. "A place nearer London would suit me much better. I should scarcely care to sell the old house to a stranger, but to a friend it's a different thing."

"What, Mr. Damer!" Laura Dashwood exclaimed wonderingly! "you would really sell a house that has been in your family so long?"

"Why not, Miss Dashwood, if this particular member of my family doesn't happen to want it?"

"Are you in earnest, Mr. Damer?" asked George Dashwood.

"Entirely so."

"And you will sell the place as it stands—pictures and old oak cabinets, tapestries and hangings complete?"

"As it stands; with every stick and every rag."

He sighed, and his face darkened for a moment. Perhaps he was thinking that among those "rags" there were draperies which his mother's hands had embellished.

"Well, sir," said the manufacturer, with an air of undisguised elation, "I can only say that, when you have quite made up your mind to sell, you have but to name your price, and George Dashwood is your purchaser. I don't think there'll be much bargaining between us."

I asked Hugh afterwards what made him talk of selling Churleigh.

"Why, you see, dear boy, if things go against me in the Leger week, I should have to part with the old place, and to do it quickly, in order to meet my engagements; so I thought it would be wise to take advantage of Dashwood's fancy. Besides, if Churleigh must go, I would rather sell it to him than to any one else. There'd be a kind of mournful pleasure in fancying Laura happy in the home of my childhood—happy with a husband perhaps, and a brood of children. I can fancy her walking in the dear old gardens, or sitting under the cedar yonder, with the little ones at her knees; while I am a lonely battered exile, fighting the battle of life somewhere beyond the sea. It's hard, isn't it, Fred? But it isn't inevitable yet. Who knows that the Leger won't bring me a small fortune?

No man's ill luck can go on for ever, and I've been losing steadily for the last two years."

"I wish you had something better than the Turf to trust to for your deliverance, Hugh," I said. "I wish you would confide in Miss Dashwood's love and her father's generosity. He seems to be a man capable of taking a liberal view of things."

He shook his head gloomily.

"No, Fred; it isn't possible for a Damer to become a dependent upon his wife."

After this I heard no more of my friend's troubles for some time. He gave himself up utterly to the delight of Laura Dashwood's society, and seemed to enjoy life with a reckless, boisterous kind of happiness in that brief ten days of bright autumnal weather—a season in which there still remained much of the warmth and glory of summer.

Churleigh was a very pleasant house to stay in: the servants numerous and well trained; the cool shadowy gardens delicious at all times; the billiard and smoking rooms the perfection of comfort; and the old-world air of the place a perpetual soothing influence, which gave a vague indescribable charm to everything. But for me there was a sadness brooding over all things, and I could not but remember how speedily this fair heritage might pass into the keeping of a stranger.

Many times during those gay idle days, for every one of which some new pleasure was devised by the master of Churleigh, I saw a cloud upon Hugh Damer's brow; but it was only a transient shadow, and however gloomy his thoughts may have been in those fitful moments of care, Laura Dashwood had the power to chase the dark shadow from the face I knew so well. Hugh's high spirits were noticed and admired by every one. It was impossible not to enjoy life in his company, people said; his gayety was infectious.

"That fellow can never have known a care in his life," one of his friends remarked to me; "and yet I never knew a man drop his money more persistently than he did last year. But then, you see, the fellow is so confoundedly rich."

We had picnics and water-parties; carpet-dances night after night in the long low drawing-room, with the six French windows set wide open, and the scent of the flowers and all the cool dewy odors of the night wafted in upon us as we danced. We had moonlit waltzes on the lawn sometimes, when it was very pleasant to see Miss Dashwood's aërial form revolving in the strong grasp of Hugh Damer's powerful arm, and to hear her musical laughter ring out upon the still night air. What a delicious life, if it could have gone on forever!

"Yes, Fred, if it could only go on forever," Hugh said to me on the night before the first race-day, as we stood together on the deserted lawn, where we had been dancing till after midnight, while the servants were extinguishing the lights in the drawing-room one by one. "But to-morrow will see the beginning of the end, I daresay, unless my luck changes. There was a time when I thought it must change—that fortune must take a sudden turn in my favor. But somehow, as the hour draws near I have a feeling that my fate is fixed, that there's no such thing as a turn of the tide for me, that the river of life can only drift me one way—steadily down to the dark sea of ruin!"

"That's all nonsense, old fellow," I answered cheerily. "Mind you, I am the last of men to hope much from the fortune of the Turf; but still there is no reason why you should not be a winner for once in a way."

"No reason, perhaps, Fred; but I have a rooted conviction that my ill-luck will pursue me to the last. I have been too happy in that sweet girl's society—madly, recklessly happy. O God, old friend, where shall I be in a week's time?"

His tone went to my heart. I could see his face in the moonlight deadly pale, and the lips working convulsively.

"Let the worst come to the worst, Hugh, you will face misfortune like a man, I am sure of that."

"Face it like a man! That means to drag on the remnant of one's days somehow; to turn adventurer and live by one's wits; or to descend to gentlemanly beggary, and live upon one's friends. Of course it is unmanly to blow out one's brains and

make a clean finish of it; and yet that's the most convenient end for one's self and society."

"For God's sake, Hugh Damer, don't let me hear you talk like that!"

"It's wicked, I suppose. But then, you see, the whole course of my life has been wicked. If my mother could have known what that life was to be when she nursed me through my childish illness, and prayed all night long for the passing of the danger, don't you think that she would rather I had died in her arms, a child, innocent, untarnished, than that I should live to be what I am?"

"It is never too late to mend, Hugh. With such a wife as Miss Dashwood, you might become as good a man as your mother ever hoped you might be, in her fondest dreams of your future.

"I might, I might, with such a wife. Yes, Fred; but that is too bright a fate for me. I had my chance and lost it. If I had known Laura Dashwood sooner, perhaps—but it's the idlest folly to talk of what might have been; and to-morrow 'makes me or unmakes me quite.' Come, light up another regalia, Fred, and we'll have no more of this dreary talk."

CHAPTER IV.

"Fill the can, and fill the cup:
All the windy ways of men
Are but dust that rises up,
And is lightly laid again."

We went to the races in great style, Hugh Damer driving a drag, with the majority of his masculine guests on the roof, and a merry party of ladies inside, Mr. Dashwood travelling in his handsome barouche with Laura, the county matron, and one of her daughters—Laura, a vision of loveliness, in some cloudy costume of mauve and white, under a big white silk umbrella; and the rest of the Churleigh party in a roomy omnibus, in which the servants were wont to be driven to church on wet

Sundays. Arrived on the course, Hugh posted all three vehicles in an admirable position for seeing the race, and then speedily disappeared with the Squire and a good many of his friends. I, to whom the things of the Turf were utterly indifferent, remained with the ladies, but was not the less anxious for him whose fortune depended so much on the hazards of the day.

I knew nothing of Damer's engagements—what horses he had backed, or how the numerous events of the day were likely to affect him; but I heard from several quarters that the running was of an unexpected character, calculated to cause disappointment to the majority of the gentlemen speculators.

Hugh came to us several times in the course of the day, and, though he talked and laughed with Miss Dashwood and the rest, and might have seemed to a casual observer to be in excellent spirits, I saw that in his face which boded ill for the issue of the day. He drank a great deal of brandy and soda—drank with a feverish eagerness; but I noticed that he ate nothing all through the day. I secured the box-seat for the return journey, anxious to know the worst and at once.

"Well, Hugh," I asked in a low voice, when we were clear of the crowd and bowling rapidly along a smooth high road bordered with noble old timber.

"Well, Fred, I told you about that rooted conviction of mine. It was pretty correct, that's all."

"Then the day has been a bad one?"

"About as bad as it could be."

"But there's to-morrow," I said, with a faint attempt at hopefulness.

"Yes; and my luck will be about the same to-morrow that it has been to-day, I have no doubt. Did you ever see anything like the running to-day? No man can stand against such a collapse as that. Ptarmigan won the Chester as easily as these four bays of mine could win a race against a costermonger's donkey, and to-day he let himself be passed by a beggarly plater. If I didn't know the character of his stable, I could swear the brute had been got at."

"Was the day good for the ring or the public?"

"O, the bookmen got the best of it, of course. None of the favorites won."

"Were you unfortunate in everything?" I asked.

"Yes, everything."

"That's hard lines, old fellow."

"You don't know the trouble it cost me to make my book, Fred. It was a great combination which *might* have made my fortune; the last venture of a desperate man, who wanted to redeem all by one great *coup*. But I have no farther faith in it now. The campaign has opened with defeat. To-day has been my Moscow; to-morrow will be my Waterloo."

I tried to cheer him in a few low words. I don't think there was anything but gloom and bitterness in his mind; but he had that natural pride which shrinks from the revelation of misfortune. He roused himself with an effort, and talked loudly and cheerily all the way home; and I doubt if any one upon the drag except myself suspected that he had been a heavy loser by that day's work.

And by and by, at the composite meal, half dinner and half supper, which awaited us at Churleigh—a sumptuous banquet in its way, where lobster and raised pies, winged creatures of all kinds, and hot-house fruits of gorgeous coloring were heaped upon the table with the picturesque profusion of the feast in Paul Veronese's famous picture of the "Marriage in Cana of Galilee," and at which the men drank deep of Badminton and Moselle cup from huge silver tankards of the Georgian era, while the ladies sipped tea and coffee or trifled with a glass of Cliquot—the gayest at the long oak table was the host who led every peal of laughter, and said the best things that were uttered that night. We sat long and late, the ladies only retiring at midnight, Miss Dashwood declaring, as she bade her host good night, that she had never in her life spent so delightful a day. "I was always fond of races," she said with a deprecating air,—"I suppose it is a pernicious taste that is

natural to a Yorkshire woman,—but I never enjoyed anything as much as the racing to-day."

"I hope it is not the last by a great many that you will spend at Churleigh Wood," Hugh said, with a strange smile.

Late as it was when our party broke up that night, Hugh Damer and Mr. Dashwood were closeted together in the library for a full hour after the rest had gone to their rooms. I heard their voices as they wished each other good night on the stairs, and heard my friend's step as he walked slowly and heavily along the corridor leading to his own quarters. It was not like his accustomed footfall, and I knew that interview in the library must have been an unpleasant one.

"You've sold Churleigh Wood, Hugh," I said to him as we drove to the races next day.

"Yes, old fellow, the deed is done. The old place is gone from me for ever and ever. There is no time to lose. I may want the money before the week is out. The manufacturer was very liberal; has paid me a splendid price for his fancy; and the place is gone—and Laura's children will play under the oaks I used to climb fifteen years ago."

"God grant they may be your children as well as Laura's," I said. "I cannot bear to think your birthplace is quite gone from you."

"Rather hard lines, wasn't it? But a man must reap what he has sown, Fred, and I have scattered the evil seed with a free hand. I don't deserve anything better."

The next day was the Leger. That clean, airy little town, which is, in its normal condition, one of the quietest and dullest in England, brimmed over with human life, and rang loud with the buzz and clamor of innumerable tongues. This great autumnal meeting is the saturnalia of the North, and, looking at it from the outside, a pleasant festival enough; but I contemplated that noisy gathering with a jaundiced eye, and my heart sickened as I thought how the day might end for Hugh Damer.

I was too anxious about my friend's fortunes to remain with

the ladies to-day: though Laura Dashwood, in a fresh toilette of pale blue and a dainty bonnet that was all forget-me-nots—as if that floral reminder were needed! who could forget Laura, once having known her?—was lovely and fascinating enough to have held any man, not bitten by the scorpion of the Turf, bound like a slave to the wheel of her barouche. I was very uneasy about my friend, and followed him everywhere with the air of a meek Pylades dancing attendance on a very fiery Orestes—into the ring, into the paddock, and out upon the pleasant stretch of turf on the other side of the course to see the horses take their show-off canter.

"There she goes," he cried: "Baron Von Bourse's Jezebel—the bay yonder with the small head—green body and pink sleeve. I wonder how many men's hearts she carries at her hoofs? My future depends on her, Norris. I saw her win the Guineas. I'd put every sixpence I could stand upon Pasteboard—the bony gray that had been winning everything in the autumn—and she flew by him like a bird. Look at her, old boy! By Jove, she's a clipper. Isn't it a graceful action? There was a confounded lot of rain last night, and the ground's heavier than I like to see it. But I think she must win—there's nothing that can touch her, to my mind."

"Not Conjuror, your great Yorkshire horse?"

"Conjuror is as fat as a pig."

"There's a brute yonder—with the jockey in black and crimson—that I hardly like the look of, Hugh," I said doubtfully. "He's got a splendid stride. See what a lot of ground he covers."

"That!" cried Hugh contemptuously; "a rawboned beast that never won a race in his life, unless it was some pettifogging plate at the Curragh."

We posted ourselves about a quarter of a mile from the stand, just outside the phalanx of carriages, drags, wagonettes, barouches, family omnibuses, landaus, Whitechapel carts, and the rest; posted ourselves at a point from which we could get a very fair view of the finish—Hugh standing on an old cask, looming

gigantic above the rails; I just in front of his knees. There was a cold dead weight at my breast as the flag dropped, and the hoarse clamorous cry arose—

"They're off!"

The start was beautiful. For the first quarter of a mile you might have covered the field with a table-cloth. Then some obscure animal got away, and began to make the running. Then half-a-dozen more crept after him. Then the favorite, Jezebel, shot forward to the front, and took a lead which she held steadily till she was within something less than half a mile of the judge's chair.

"She wins!" roared that mighty chorus; "the mare wins!"

Hugh Damer clapped his hands on my shoulder—such a muscular grip, it felt like a hand in an iron glove.

"God bless her!" he cried—not impiously, I hope; "she has saved Churleigh."

Alas! too soon had they cheered the victor. That rawboned plater of which Damer had spoken so scornfully came tearing over the heavy ground, with a thud upon the turf that was like distant thunder, and gained on the graceful Jezebel. There was cart-horse blood in him, I believe. Nothing thorough-bred could have pounded over the clay like that.

I looked up at Damer. O God, what a white agonized face I saw!—fixed and rigid, with the eyes glaring at the winner.

"Good-bye, Churleigh," he cried, with a choking sound, that was half laugh, half sob. "That brute has ridden away with my birthplace and my wife. The ring has got the day, old fellow. There'll be boasting and rejoicing in the tents of Keedah to-night. They've been skinning the lamb all through this meeting. Come along, old chap. Let's go back to the women and hear their pretty baby-talk about it's being such a splendid race—'and, O, please, which is the Leger, Mr. Damer? is it an epergne or a tankard, and may we go and see it?'"

He put his arm in mine and dragged me off, after he had given that feeble cask a kick that sent it spinning into space.

This hollow-hearted gaiety which he put on seemed to me very piteous. I think I would rather have seen him cast himself prone upon the turf and weep aloud.

On this particular night I had again contrived to secure the seat beside him as we drove home, and once more, and in the same spot, I asked him the question I had asked at the end of the first day.

"Well, Hugh?"

"It's all over, dear boy. I am done for."

"Quite ruined, Hugh?"

"Past all possibility of redemption."

"It can't surely be so bad as that," I said; "let me help you. I am better off than you give me credit for being, I dare say. I can do something at the worst."

"No, no, my dear fellow. Anything you lent me would only be a drop in the ocean. It's like you to make the offer, but it would be letting you in for a loss without doing me any good. I must make the best settlement I can with my creditors, and then—"

He paused, and I waited in vain for the end of that sentence.

"And then what, Hugh?" I asked anxiously.

"Who knows? Who knows what becomes of all the men who go to the dogs? They go across the seas somewhere, I suppose, and drop out of the knowledge of the circle they have lived in; or they hold horses—since Will Shakespeare's time it's the orthodox thing for a man who's down in his luck to hold horses. Anything is better than the chance of being met in Oxford-street by an old acquaintance, out at elbows and with boots that are themselves a history."

"Then you mean that you will emigrate?"

"I mean nothing at present—except to make the best settlement of my debts that I can."

"Hugh Damer, give me your honor as a gentleman that you will do nothing rash."

"Rash! you mean that I musn't make a sudden end of a worthless life. Don't be afraid, Fred; men have a weak way

of clinging to existence, let it be ever so troublesome. Life is a habit, you see, and sometimes a very bad habit, but it's not one of which a man can easily cure himself. I shall go on living, depend upon it, somehow."

"And remember, Hugh, how many men have to face the world without a sixpence—to trust in their own talents alone for success. And you have power so much above the ruck. You are young enough to begin life again."

"At thirty, Fred, and after living at the rate I have lived? I doubt it. But don't waste any thought upon my future, dear boy—I'm not worth it."

My heart bled for him as we drove the long avenue leading to Churleigh, and I saw the old Tudor mansion, with its many-shaped windows flashing brightness upon the autumn night. Within there was the glow and warmth of fires, welcome even at this early season; the flash and glitter of rare old glass and silver on the long dining-table; and withal that air of mingled repose and grandeur only to be found to perfection in an old house, where every object has the grace and charm of an age that has gone by.

The Dashwoods, and all the rest of the guests, were to leave next day, but at Hugh's earnest request the manufacturer consented to stay till the following Monday morning.

"Let us have one quiet Sunday together," my poor friend pleaded, glancing from George Dashwood to his daughter, who stood a little way apart, watching him, with parted, faintly-tremulous lips, and a somewhat richer bloom than usual on her cheeks; "just one quiet Sunday. You see, the house has been so full of people that I have really been scarcely able to enjoy your society—and we are something more than ordinary acquaintances; we are friends, are we not? and I should like for us to have just one quiet day together."

"Friends! yes, I should think we are," the manufacturer answered heartily; "and I hope we shall pass many days together. However, as you make such a point of Sunday, why, we'll stay. You don't mind, do you, Laura?" She shook her

head, with a gracious smile, and a still deeper blush, and then bent down to caress a favorite pointer of Hugh's.

"I shall be glad to have a walk round the grounds and a little serious talk with you, Damer," her father went on. "There are some alterations I think of making, and I should like your opinion about them."

"Alterations?" cried Laura; "surely you wouldn't change anything where all is so perfect?"

Hugh gave her a grateful look—only one brief glance, but it expressed a great deal, I thought.

CHAPTER V.

"Life's joy for us a moment lingers,
And death seems in the word farewell."

I TRIED to get away on Saturday, thinking that my friend would like to be quite alone with the Dashwoods, but it was no use; Hugh was determined that I should stay to the last. So I stayed, and I believe I was of some value in engrossing the manufacturer's society, and listening patiently to a good deal of talk about trade-unionism and the manner in which commercial England was digging her own grave, while Hugh and Laura strolled side by side among the shady paths of the shrubberies, and on the broad sunny walk beside the moat, making a poor pretence of being intensely interested in the fish that glanced to and fro under the dark still water, or in the showy groups of geraniums on the sloping bank.

I knew that they were happy—that it was a halcyon Sabbath for Hugh Damer, though he was forbidden to speak the words that must have risen so often to his lips.

We went to the old church, just beyond the gates of Churleigh Wood, in the morning; and Laura sat under the white marble tablet that recorded the virtues of Hugh Damer's dead mother, while all about and around us were effigies of departed and heroic Damers, who had worn sword or gown in the good days that were gone.

That peaceful Sunday came to a close at last, and I thought at nightfall that there was a look of sadness, and even disappointment, in Laura's expressive face. Perhaps she had expected something more from Hugh Damer than those airy nothings, those graceful compliments, which had been his tribute to her that day.

The Dashwoods left very early next morning, and I, who was to go away half an hour later, was present at their departure. I saw a sad wistful look in Laura's face as she wished my friend good-bye.

"There shall be no change in this place that *I* can help, Mr. Damer," she said gently; "be sure of that."

"You are an angel of kindness, Miss Dashwood, and I am almost happy that my old home should pass into your hands."

"And yet it was a strange caprice to sell it," she said wonderingly.

"A caprice—yes; but you see it is the nature of men to be fickle."

"And I suppose you are like the rest of your species," she answered, with a faint sigh. "There are some family portraits, by the bye, that you will wish to keep, of course," she added shyly. "They shall be sent to you when you are settled."

"You are all goodness. I will ask for them—when I am settled."

"Come, Laura," cried Mr. Dashwood, "are you going to keep Damer there for ever with your chatter? Remember that I have an appointment at Dedham at two. Good-bye, Damer; be sure that this place will always be your home whenever you like to come to it."

"A thousand thanks—good-bye. Good-bye, Miss Dashwood."

And so those two parted, with not so much as a farewell pressure of the hands to betray Hugh Damer's love.

"God bless her!" he said softly, after he had stood for some minutes silently watching the carriage as it drove along the broad road that circled the gardens, and disappeared in the

avenue leading to the gates. "God bless her fair young face! She's the sweetest girl that ever I looked upon; and I think she could have loved me, if I had been free to ask her love."

"Think she could have loved you?" I echoed indignantly, "why, I know that she loves you, and that you have almost broken her innocent heart by not speaking out like a man. If you had only made a clean breast of it yesterday, when you and she were meandering about the gardens in an obvious state of mutual spooniness, you might have had everything comfortably settled with old Dashwood this morning."

"No, Fred, it's impossible—I am a beggar."

I had no time to argue the case just then; the dog-cart was waiting to drive me to Doncaster in time for the up-train. I begged Hugh to come straight to me when he came to London, which I expected him to do speedily; to make my quarters his home whenever he was in town; and to trust me fully, in honor of our friendship, which meant nothing if it did not mean a real confidence in each other. He promised to do this, shook my hands heartily, and hurried me off to the dog-cart. My last backward glance showed me the tall figure standing alone upon the broad gravel path by the moat, in the beloved home which was his no longer.

He never came to me; my anxious and laborious inquiries about him resulted only in the vaguest possible information. No one, either in London or at Churleigh Wood, could give me any definite account of his whereabouts. There was a general impression that he had gone abroad, but no one could say where. He had settled his affairs in a speedy but satisfactory manner, paid all his racing debts in full and some other creditors, made a composition with others, and so on; and had left Churleigh quietly one October morning, with a single portmanteau, and with a scrubby Scotch terrier called Nailbrush, which had been wont to sleep in an old hat box in his dressing-room, for his only companion and attendant, bound none knew whither. Every one spoke well of him and wished him well, but no one could set my mind at ease as to his fate.

I remembered that wild talk of his about making an easy end of all his difficulties with a pistol, and for a long time I was haunted by a dreadful fear. I watched the newspapers for accounts of nameless suicides; I visited dead-houses, to look upon hapless creatures found drowned, and unclaimed by the living; I put myself in communication with the police. Happily nothing came of all this, and I began to hope that Hugh Damer had indeed gone to seek his fortunes in a newer and wider world.

CHAPTER VI.

"And now those vivid hours are gone.
Like mine own life to me thou art,
Where Past and Present, wound in one,
Do make a garland for the heart."

FIVE years went by, and I had heard nothing of Damer. Every autumn I had made a point of spending a week or a fortnight at the pretty rustic village near the gates of Churleigh Wood. Every year I fancied that I should obtain some tidings of my friend; every year I became more attached to the place. I had excellent lodgings in the pretty picturesque abode of a farmer's widow, half cottage, half villa, and my annual visit had become quite an institution.

I had grown very intimate with the Dashwoods in the course of these yearly holidays, and the manufacturer had given me many hospitable invitations to make Churleigh my head-quarters. This I did not care to do. The place was too closely associated with my lost friend for it to seem natural to me as a home without him. But it was impossible altogether to resist Mr. Dashwood's friendly advances, and little by little I became a frequent visitor at the noble old house. Laura was still unmarried; no children's voices had yet awakened the echoes of the sombre oak-panelled galleries; Hugh's fancy picture of the fair young mother sitting under the cedar with her babies round her had not been realized. She was no less

lovely than when I first beheld her as Hugh Damer's guest, but her beauty had a pensive shadow upon it in these latter days, I fancied; and I wondered whether she still cherished the memory of him who had once been master of Churleigh Wood. Her father told me that she had rejected many suitors, and declined more than one eligible alliance.

"It's rather hard upon me, you see," Mr. Dashwood said plaintively, "for I am getting old and shaky, and I should like to see my little girl married to an honest man, and established in a good position, before I go off the hooks. She'll have a good bit of money when I'm gone, and a young woman with money is a fair mark for every adventurer."

"I think Miss Dashwood is too wise to become the prey of an adventurer," I replied; "her pure mind would never mistake pinchbeck for gold."

"Yes, she is a good girl," the father answered with a sigh; "but I should like to see her married."

"To a man of equal fortune to her own, I suppose?" I said, anxious to find out how the land might have lain for my friend Damer, had he made Miss Dashwood an offer.

"Well, yes," the manufacturer answered meditatively. "You see, if a man is poor, it's difficult to get rid of the notion that he's more or less of a fortune-hunter. I should like my daughter to marry a man whose means placed him beyond that suspicion."

"Ah!" I thought. "Then there would have been no chance for Damer."

When I went to Churleigh Wood next autumn, there was no cheery loud-voiced host to bid me welcome. George Dashwood lay in a newly-built vault near the resting-place of the Damers, and a handsome monument in the old church bore the record of his homely virtues. He had been dead nearly a year—carried off suddenly, in full health and vigor, as it seemed, by a stroke of apoplexy.

Miss Dashwood had been abroad for the greater part of the time since her father's death, the woman at the lodge told me;

but she was at Churleigh now, fondly welcomed by the poor of the district, to whom she had ever been a generous friend. She was more devoted to them, even, than of old, the woman told me, seeing no company, and giving the best part of her life to works of charity and benevolence.

I called upon her on the day after my arrival, and found her calm and serenely lovely in her sombre mourning robes. She had a widowed aunt living with her, a sister of Mr. Dashwood's; a homely matron, who had been a small farmer's wife, and whose existence had been spent in the quiet atmosphere of a rural homestead; an honest, kindly soul, who spoke a broad Yorkshire *patois* that was almost like a foreign language to me, and to whom Laura seemed warmly attached.

We talked much of her dead father, and my hearty praises of him seemed to touch Miss Dashwood keenly.

"You will dine with us before you leave the village, I hope, Mr. Norris," she said, when I was taking my departure. "We are only two solitary women, and cannot offer you a very lively evening, but I know you are fond of the old house."

I accepted the invitation, and dined at Churleigh on the following evening. The curate of the parish, a rather insipid young man, with ritualistic proclivities, had been asked to meet me. We were a very quiet party of four, but there was no dulness for me in that tranquil evening. There was a tender charm in Laura Dashwood's society which I had never found in that of any other woman, and the refinement of all her surroundings seemed more marked now that her father's somewhat *bourgeoise* figure was missing from the picture.

We dined in the cedar parlor, and adjourned for our dessert to the library—a noble old room of octagonal shape, large and lofty, with four wide high windows opening upon a flower-garden, which had always been sacred to the châtelaines of Churleigh. It was a sultry evening, and the four windows were all open; the little lawn beyond them steeped in a tender silvery moonlight, the semicircle of trees that shut us in from the outer world rising dark and high against a cloudless heaven.

On such an evening one has a natural aversion from artificial light, so, by general desire, there was only one lamp lighted in the library, a moderator, with a large opaque globe and a dark-green velvet shade, which stood on an oaken table in a remote corner of the room.

Miss Dashwood officiated by and by with her own fair hands at a pretty little oval tea-table by one of the open windows, and we drank our fragrant orange-pekoe out of old egg-shell china teacups without handles, in a very homelike and friendly fashion. After tea Mrs. Pollard, the farmer's widow, retired to a shady corner, where, I think, she indulged in a placid slumber; while the curate withdrew to the lamp-lit table, and amused himself turning over a portfolio of photographs collected by Laura during her late travels.

Miss Dashwood and I were thus left alone at our open window. She was seated in a meditative attitude, looking dreamily out at the moonlit lawn, and for some time I could see that she bore her part in our conversation in a half-mechanical manner, and that her thoughts were very far away. This became so obvious to me after a little while, that I left off talking altogether at last, and we sat in silence, both of us looking out at that tranquil garden, so fair in the solemn hush of the warm September night.

"Do you know what anniversary this is?" she asked me by and by, in a sudden way that almost startled me.

"An anniversary?"

"Yes, the fifteenth—the date of the St. Leger which we saw run with your friend Mr. Damer. You—you have not heard of him lately, I suppose?" she asked timidly. I doubt whether in the broad light of day she would have found courage to ask me that question. Certainly she had never asked it so directly before.

"I have had no tidings whatever of or from him in all the five years that have gone by since that day."

"Do you think he is dead?" she asked, her voice trembling a little.

"Well, no; I can't bring myself to believe that. You know the proverb about bad news. I think, if anything had happened to cut short his career, I should have heard of it somehow. I know he had almost made up his mind to emigrate—try his luck in the Colonies, and so on."

"I fear he was quite ruined when he sold papa this place."

"Yes, it was all over with him when he brought his mind to *that* sacrifice."

"And I thought him hard-hearted for parting with his birth place. How unjust I was!"

"Indeed, Miss Dashwood? I do not believe you were disposed to be ungenerous to him."

"Ungenerous! No; he would not have found me ungenerous, if he would only have trusted me."

Her tone was unspeakably tender as she pronounced those few last words.

"There was no one more anxious than I that he should trust you," I said; "for I knew how dearly he loved you."

"Loved me! And you knew that?"

"Yes. I knew that he loved you with all his heart and soul. But he was too proud to offer himself to you in his beggary."

She made no remark upon this. I too was silent, for I knew that she was thinking of my friend; knew, as I had known from the first, that she loved him.

Presently, with a suddenness that startled both of us, there came a shadow athwart the moonlight—the tall gaunt figure of a man; a figure which seemed at once strange and yet familiar to me, and the sight of which set my heart throbbing violently.

He came across the moonlit lawn, and stood facing the window where we sat. Laura Dashwood rose to her feet, looking at him intently, very pale in the moonlight.

"Good evening, Miss Dashwood," he said in a low voice, and with that quiet ease of manner which some men would carry with them to the pillory or the block. "Is there any welcome at Churleigh Wood for a wanderer and an outcast?"

"Mr. Damer!" she cried, and I could hear the rapture in the faint yet eager cry.

"Hugh! dear old Hugh!" I shouted, clasping his hands in mine. How thin and wasted the once muscular fingers felt as I grasped them!

"Why, what is this, dear boy? you are as pale a ghost!" I exclaimed, as Hugh Damer dropped heavily into a chair.

"I have been very ill on the passage home—intermittent fever, or something of that kind. There was no doctor on board ship, but the skipper physicked me in a rough-and-ready fashion of his own, and at one time he gave me little hope that I should ever see the old country again. However, I pulled through somehow. I have rather a strong will, you know, Fred, and I grappled with grim death hand to hand. I wanted so to come home."

"After five years, Hugh," I said. "Why not in all those five years?"

"I had a purpose to accomplish, and I waited till it was accomplished. When that was done, the home sickness grew upon me like a kind of madness. I overworked myself, perhaps, a little towards the end of my exile; I was so eager to return, to look upon Churleigh Wood once more. But I had not been on board the vessel three days before I was struck down with this wretched fever; and till within a week of our landing I was not able to drag myself on deck. We only reached Liverpool this afternoon, and I have pushed across-country as fast as the railways would let me, wasting most wearisome intervals at out-of-the-way junctions, and altogether enduring a prolonged trial of human patience. Thank God, I am here at last! Miss Dashwood—Laura—there was something I would have given the world to say to you on that last happy Sunday we spent in this house—something I dared not tell you then. I have come from the other side of the world to say it now."

When this secret was told, I know not; but I know that we finished the evening very pleasantly, weak as Hugh Damer still was. He went home to share my lodgings with me, and my

landlady and I nursed him between us, and made a strong man of him in a very short time. This being done, I was fain to return to the busy world, and leave my old friend in possession of my quarters.

Two months afterwards, in the gray misty November, there was a quiet wedding in the old church amongst the effigies of departed Damers, and the fair young mistress of Churleigh Wood took the name of its old masters.

"Well, darling," Hugh said to his bride, as they stood in the old gothic porch waiting for the carriage that was to convey them on the first stage of their honeymoon journey, "I suppose you think you have married a pauper?"

"I know that I have married the only man I ever loved, Hugh," she answered, in her low tender voice, "and that is all I ever thought of."

"Then I am happy to tell you that he is also one of the richest men in Sidney, my pet," Hugh answered, smiling down upon the fair face. "I went away to redeem my fortune and return to you, Laura, or to remain away forever. There were no half measures for me. I was a speculator, and a desperate one—for my case was desperate—but an honest one always, dear; and fortune favored me. I used to fancy that your influence protected and succored me. There seemed a kind of magic in my success, and the day came at last when I won the great prize, and was master of a fortune that I might fairly ask you to share. Only it was pleasant for me to defer telling you this till you had taken me for better, for worse, sweet one, and to know that you would have taken me penniless."

What need I tell after this? When the happy sound of wedding bells rings out upon the air, one can generally guess the end of the story; although there are those who do come to grief, and ruin worse than death, after marriage.

Those two of whom I have written were very happy; no cloud came athwart their sunshine; and I have seen Laura sitting under the big cedar, with her children round her, and Hugh Damer lying at her feet among his babies—not a lonely exile,

wandering far away broken-hearted, as he had fancied himself doomed to wander when he made the picture.

Churleigh opens its hospitable door to me every autumn. The old master of the Glendown Hunt has gone to that quiet rest from which even the deep-mouthed voices of his favorites are not loud enough to waken him, and Hugh has been elected, by the popular voice of the neighborhood, into that honorable position. He hunts about six times a week; gives hunting breakfasts that are banquets of an almost Gargantuan character, and I go down for a run with him now and then, with my portmanteau stuffed full of briefs—not one of which I look at during my holiday.

Often, on autumnal evenings, pacing up and down by the moat, enjoying the social weed in a kind of half silence that is pleasanter than talk, we drop out a word or two about that unforgotten Leger.

"It was much better to win the race by your own pluck and industry, than by the swiftness of Jezebel's heels, wasn't it, Hugh?" I said once.

"Well, I don't know, old fellow," he answered in his careless way. "I lost five years of paradise, and had to work like a galley-slave among our friends in the Antipodes. But I suppose it makes a better moral."

THE SINS OF THE FATHERS.

CHAPTER I.

DEVERILL'S WOOING.

T was a wild and reckless court to which George, Lord Deverill, brought his fair young wife in those early days after the Restoration, when all the pleasure-lovers and volatile spirits of England were recompensing themselves for the dreary interregnum in which Puritanism had reigned supreme throughout the length and breadth of the land. A reckless and dissipated court, and a reckless and dissipated monarch, centre of one unchangingly vicious circle of flatterers and parasites; good-natured enough in the main, no doubt, even to the selling of Dunkirk to oblige his friends on the other side of the Channel; generous and affectionate to his mistresses and favorites; not given to cruelty in an active manner, yet willing that his enemies should pay the price of their treason; altogether an easy-going ruler, across whose flowery path the dark memory of his father's martyrdom seldom cast a shadow; above all, a most popular sovereign, most of all in that court region where the brilliant pageantry of his life made a perpetual festival.

To such a court George Deverill, master of Deverill Castle—a grim and stony gothic pile, half fortress, half palace, in the far north—and of a most princely revenue, brought his young

wife; a wild rose-bud kind of beauty, not quite twenty years of age, and nearly thirty years younger than her husband.

All the court fell in love with Lady Deverill at first sight. Even the women were enthusiastic about her beauty. It was scarcely a dangerous kind of loveliness. The poor child's too evident timidity forbade her ever becoming a rival to those bolder dames.

"Poor little wild-wood blossom," said the court rhymesters, "she seems oppressed by the burden of her greatness as Lady Deverill. She ought to have married a country parson, and spent her days in an atmosphere of syllabubs and new-mown hay. She is no more fit for our world than the pure light of the evening star is adapted to mingle with the garish blaze of the lamps at Whitehall."

And who was this fair young creature, and where did she come from? people asked curiously. Their questions were soon answered. She was the only child of Sir Talbot Treherne, a Cornish baronet of ruined fortunes, who had died three years before, in a dreary old house among the wild barren hills of that far western coast. A stanch royalist, but a bad man, said those who remembered his career. Lord Deverill and he had been fast friends in the days of their luckless master, but had parted company after the king's death; Deverill to follow his prince's fortunes abroad, Treherne to retire to his remnant of estate in Cornwall, carrying with him his motherless little girl.

When the Cornishman found himself dying, he wrote to his old friend, entreating him to take upon himself the guardianship of the orphan girl, his darling Alice, and her pitiful little fortune; and to see that she fell into the hands of no villain or adventurer, but married an honest gentleman.

"She is comely," the father wrote; "and you are not likely to have much trouble in finding her a husband, small as her dowry will be. I only ask that he should be an honest man. In any other case, there are convents abroad where a gentleman's daughter may find a fitting shelter. We are of the old faith, as you know, Deverill; and Alice would not be the first

of my race to abandon the turmoil and temptation of the world for the quiet shadow of the convent-wall."

It is but too often the fate of a man, whose mode of life throws him into the society of the profligate and unprincipled, to find himself at the last with no friend of high character in whom he can repose his dying trust. Certainly George Deverill was scarcely the man to whose care a fond father would have left his only child, had the field for choice been wider. But Deverill was not a profligate; and he was, perhaps, the only man among Talbot Treherne's intimate acquaintances whose character was not tainted by the vulgar vices.

He was a stern hard man, with a dark foreign-looking face, which had once been eminently handsome, but which, growing more haughty of expression year by year under the influence of disappointed ambition, was now chiefly remarkable for sullen pride, and a latent fierceness which boded ill for any one who should offend Lord Deverill.

His lordship's feelings on receiving his old friend's letter—which, in the slow transit of those days, did not reach him until Talbot Treherne was numbered with the dead—were by no means of unalloyed delight. What, in the name of the evil one, was he to do with a ward not twenty years of age; a beauty, spoilt by a weak old father; self-willed, no doubt, and eager for a life of pleasure? George Deverill meant to spend the greater part of his life about the court, and how was he to endure the encumbrance of a ward, who would be mistaken for his daughter most likely, and would make him seem an old man before his time?

Yes, the father was right; the convent would be the best place for Alice Treherne; and if she objected to a French or a Belgian convent, why she might go and spend her days at Deverill Castle, where there was an old housekeeper, and an attenuated staff of ancient retainers, deaf and rheumatic for the most part; and where the grass grew in the great stone quadrangle, and dark damp moss crept over the lower walls, and owls hooted at night in the ivy that covered the tall towers at each angle of the gaunt old pile.

Lord Deverill smiled at his own humorous fancies with a grim and saturnine smile, as he thought of that remote northern mansion being made the bower of youth and beauty.

It was necessary for him to act, and promptly, he told himself, so as to get this troublesome business off his hands. So he went down to Cornwall to see the girl, and settle matters with her. The journey was long and tiresome; the weather cold and gloomy. He had some thoughts of sending his steward with a letter announcing his intentions, and empowering the man to conduct Mistress Alice either to a foreign convent or the far northern castle. But, he argued with himself, this line of conduct might seem scarcely kind; and Talbot Treherne had once been his bosom friend. Moreover, should the girl prove rebellious, and set her face against either convent or castle, the steward might be unable to manage her. Lord Deverill had no fear that she would disobey *him;* and again he smiled at his own fancies, with that peculiar smile of his. He was a man who was accustomed to be obeyed, had governed those about him from his earliest manhood by the simple force of his stern hard nature, and could but smile at the thought of opposition from this girl.

So he went to Treherne Court himself.

He went himself; and Alice neither took shelter in a foreign convent nor was doomed to the dismal solitude of Deverill Castle. George Deverill, whose heart had never been touched by a woman in all the nine-and-forty years of his life, fell desperately in love with his dead friend's daughter before he had known her a week. He did not yield himself up weakly or easily to this foolish fancy, as he called his passion in his arguments with himself. Nay, he battled sternly with himself, and fought a hard fight before he was fain to own himself utterly beaten. But he loved her—he loved her. It all began and ended in those common words. The heart which had been colder than ice, harder than iron until now, was melted all at once, and owned this simple girl for its mistress.

What was it that had subjugated this cold stern nature. Her

beauty? Scarcely that; for, lovely as she was, George Deverill had seen many women who were her equals, if not superiors, in outward charms, and who possessed finished graces of manner which she had not. Perhaps her very helplessness and timidity, her utter innocence and childishness, may have enhanced her loveliness in George Deverill's eyes. For himself, he scarcely knew what it was that he loved in her; he only knew that he did love her with a passion against which reason pleaded in vain.

Helpless and friendless though she was, and easy as the code of gentlemanly honor was in those days, Lord Deverill was incapable of a dishonorable thought or a guilty hope. His errors were not the common errors of his time. His was a dark passionate nature, not without a rugged kind of nobility, which showed itself in his countenance at times, despite that repellant look of pride which was its ordinary expression.

He had intended to finish his business at Treherne Court in something less than a week. He stopped there a month, and at the end of that time asked Alice Treherne to be his wife.

He had scarcely any hope that she loved him. What so unlikely as that this fair flower could entwine itself about his rugged barren trunk, scathed atop by the lightnings of a life's disappointment? No, he expected little love in return for his passionate devotion, of which indeed he had given her small evidence, being of too proud a nature to reveal so much weakness. But he had watched her closely, and he told himself that she was pure-minded and affectionate, innocent and dutiful, and that she must needs make a faithful wife. He fancied that in her helplessness, in the utter blankness of her future prospects, she would scarcely reject such a position as that he had to offer her. He counted upon this and nothing more.

So one evening, when these two were alone together in the dreary saloon at Treherne Court, where the faded tapestries and worm-eaten furniture had a dismal look of poverty and decay, George Deverill asked Alice to be his wife. He did not say much about his love, shrinking with an aversion that was

almost a physical pain from any revelation of his passion. He dwelt rather upon her own loneliness, his old friendship for her father, and the wisdom of such an union. He had prepared himself for the worst, even to see a look of dislike in the fair young face, or of scorn perhaps—scorn of his fifty years.

What was his surprise when the fair head sank gently upon his breast, the sweet face nestling close to him to hide its blushes!

"Alice, look up; speak to me; is it yes or no?" he said eagerly.

She did look up at him through her tears. The rosebud lips trembled, but did not speak.

"Alice, will you be my wife?"

"O, my lord, you have made me so proud, so happy!"

"What!" he cried, "you love me, then, child?"

"With all my heart."

Lord Deverill looked down at the fair blushing face wondringly, nay, with a look of scrutiny that was almost severe. He was more startled by the girl's confession than if she had told him that she hated him. Love him—this bright young creature, in all the glory of her girlhood and beauty—love *him*, the hard man of the world, thirty years her senior! A passionate rapture stirred his heart at the thought; and yet with that deep sense of joy there mingled the shadow of doubt. Could he believe her? It seemed so unlikely—and women, ay, even the fairest and youngest, are such deceivers. All the stories of womanly treachery he had ever heard seemed to crowd into his mind at that moment. Yet he drew the girl closer to his breast, and set his lips upon the pure brow.

"So be it, then, my sweet one," he said, with tenderness that seemed strange even to himself, so alien was it from the sternness of his nature. "Thou art mine henceforward—the fairest bride that ever brightened a man's heart. And thou wilt not grow weary of me, though I am so much older than thou, and am apt to seem cold and churlish even to those I love the best?"

"Weary of you!" the girl repeated, with a happy smile; "I love you, I honor you, as I have loved and honored none

but my father. You were his chosen friend. He used to talk of you so often, that I made a picture of you in my mind—yes, and my picture was like you; only not noble enough. But how could I think that you would ever stoop to love me—you who could choose a wife from all the lovely ladies of the court, and might have won the loveliest and noblest of them?"

The tender flattery touched his heart, but he made no reply. He was still looking down at the innocent face with that anxious searching gaze of his. It was so hard for him to believe implicitly in her truth, even now. His cynical mind had been ever prone to doubt his fellow-men, and the thought of his rank and wealth came between him and his perfect trust in this girl whom he loved so passionately. Yet it was something to have won the prize upon which he had set his heart; and if George Deverill was not so happy as he should have been that night, there was at least a sense of triumph in his mind which was a fair substitute for happiness.

Dame Margery Dormer, a widow lady of reduced fortunes, who had been Sir Talbot's housekeeper for the last fifteen years, and had served as a kind of duenna for Alice, heard of her young mistress's betrothal with much satisfaction, more especially as Lord Deverill told her that she need have no anxiety about her own future. She might end her days at Treherne Court, and consider herself in all essentials mistress of that Cornish mansion, which he and his wife were not likely to visit very often.

"I daresay Alice would like to have the place kept up, for love of her father's memory," he said; "and she may have a fancy to spend a summer holiday here now and then—so we will patch up the old walls, Mistress Dormer, and make the roof weather-tight."

Alice thanked him for this kind thought of her. Yes, she had loved her father fondly, and the house where he had lived and died must needs be always sacred in her eyes. Dame Dormer kissed my lord's hand in a rapture of gratitude, and yet, proud as she was of her darling's conquest, Lord Deverill seemed to her cold and stern, and she could not banish some

faint shadow of fear for the future. Would he be always kind and thoughtful like this? or would there come a time when, his brief fancy being past, he would neglect or ill-treat his wife?

Dame Margery ventured even to hint these doubts to her fair young charge; but the girl heard her with indignant surprise. Doubt him, her lord and her idol, that noble gentleman who seemed to her the perfection of manly grace and virtue! The poor child had seen so few people in her short life, and had heard and thought so much of her father's friend before she saw him. She had never fancied that she should love him; she had associated his image only with sentiments of reverence and esteem. Yet before she had known him a fortnight, that dark proud face, that deep thrilling voice, the haughty grace of those stately manners, learned in a statelier court than that of the second Charles, had kindled a warmer feeling in the girl's heart, and Alice Treherne loved George Deverill with all the innocent enthusiasm, the trusting worship of a first love. That he was so much her senior, only gave him an additional charm and a loftier grandeur in her eyes. It is natural to a girl to mingle something of idolatry with her first love.

CHAPTER II.

ALICE THE BRIDE.

George Deverill's courtship was not a long one. Alice would fain have postponed the wedding until a year after her father's death; but her lover argued that reverence for the departed was not shown in this observance of outward forms, and that her father would himself have desired a speedy union between his orphan child and his oldest friend.

"He wished me to be your guardian, Alice," said her lover; "it was his dying request. What guardian so good as a husband? Nay, dearest, I am sure that he would wish us quickly married."

Alice Treherne loved George Deverill too well to oppose any

desire of his with much show of resolution. She loved him, and was ruled by him; being of a gentle yielding disposition, to which obedience and submission were natural. So the wedding—a very quiet rustic business—took place a little more than three months after Talbot Treherne was laid in the dungeon-like vault beneath Treherne church, where his ancestors for many generations, knights, soldiers, and statesmen, reposed in peace.

Before the marriage in the church, there was another ceremonial in the small private chapel leading out of the hall at Treherne Court: where an old French priest, a hanger-on and dependent of the late Baronet during many years, united Lord Deverill and Alice according to the rites of the Roman Catholic Church. They were of different creeds these two; but George Deverill, not being a religious man, troubled himself very little about his young wife's heresy. He did not, it is true, much relish the notion that Jesuits, like this old priest, would have a right to come between him and Alice, would possess more of her confidence than he himself, perhaps; yet he trusted in his own power to prevent too much of this priestly interference.

He carried his fair young bride to court, and was not a little proud of the admiration which greeted her in that wild assembly. He was well pleased, too, with the timidity that made her shrink from those tributes to her charms which a vainer, bolder woman would have courted.

The new home to which Lord Deverill conducted his wife was a stately house near the river, between Whitehall and the Temple, not very far from that noble mansion of Francis Bacon's, which James I. had been so eager to procure for his worthless favorite—"I must have it for Carr."

It was rather a gloomy house, this town residence of Lord Deverill's, handsome as it was; and the street in which it was situated was narrow, and of a somewhat dismal aspect. But my lord's house was at the end nearest the river, a corner house, and the principal rooms commanded a fine view of the Thames and the opposite shore. There was a narrow flight of

stone stairs leading from a door in the basement down to the water; and a grim lion's head in wrought-iron, with a chain hanging from the jaw, to which any one landing could moor his boat. At high tide the water used to cover the lower half of these stairs, and wash with a monotonous splashing sound against the stone wall of the lower chambers.

The furniture of this mansion was splendid and costly, handsomer than anything Alice had ever seen before, but of a bygone fashion, ponderous and sombre-looking. There were black-velvet hangings, and an ebony bedstead crowned with funereal plumes in the best bedchamber, and great cabinets and wardrobes of carved ebony, which Alice was almost afraid to open. The floors were of polished oak, dark with age and much labor; and in their shining surface Alice Darrell used to see a faint reflection of herself looking up at her, as if from a pool of dark water. She thought sometimes, with a shudder, that upon such a floor as this blood-stains would scarcely be visible, and wondered whether murder had ever been done in that house.

Even the drawing-rooms had a gloomy air; there was more carved ebony, and the walls of the chief apartment were hung with a tapestry wrought by a departed Lady Deverill. On one side there was the history of Judith and Holofernes, after an old Venetian painter—not a pleasant subject for daily contemplation; on the other, the stoning of Stephen. The window-hangings were of dark crimson velvet, so dark as to seem almost black in the shadow; and before the doors there hung voluminous curtains of the same costly fabric. There were solid silver fire-irons chained to each side of the wide hearths, and everywhere the evidence of wealth. But wealth alone cannot render a house cheerful; and the only room that Alice cared to occupy was a small chamber at the end of the stately suite, with a single window, and a stone balcony overhanging the river. This room also was hung with tapestry, but the subject of the work was gay and pleasant. Behind the tapestry there was a little door opening into a narrow passage in the wall, and a secret stair leading down to the river.

In this room Alice Deverill spent a great deal of her life, for the most part alone, busy with her embroidery-frame, her painting, her books, or her music. She was studious and fond of solitude. Her father had been a man of considerable accomplishments, and towards the close of his existence, when the wild pleasures upon which he had wasted his youth and manhood were no longer accessible to him, he had devoted himself to the education of his daughter. Thus it was that Alice possessed resources not very common to the fair sex in those days.

She liked to be alone; so, when Lord Deverill proposed to engage some well-born damsel to bear her company during the many hours in which the duties of the court and the cares of a political career kept him absent from her, she entreated him not to give her the companionship of a stranger; assuring him that the hours were never long to her, except on account of his absence; and that if she could not have him to bear her company, she would infinitely prefer to be alone.

"I fear thou art a spoilt child, Alice," he said, looking down at her with that subdued fondness which marked all his intercourse with the wife he loved so well. "It shall be as thou wilt have it, whether thy choice be wise or foolish."

Never, perhaps, was a more indulgent husband than George Deverill; not so much in words, for his pride made him reserved even to Alice, as in deeds. He loaded her with gifts—the costliest dresses, the rarest gems, a harpsichord like one that had been made in Paris for the queen, books, tiny toy spaniels, such as were the rage at court; a new carriage to take her to court, with four cream-colored horses of matchless breeding; everything that the most exacting of womankind could demand from an indulgent husband and an inexhaustible purse.

Alice was very grateful for all these fresh evidences of her husband's love: but she entreated him to hold his hand, to load her with no farther favors. In sober truth, she cared very little for the splendors that surrounded her. Those costly

robes seemed to weigh down her slender figure; those flashing jewels dazzled her eyes. She shrank abashed from the gaze of the idle populace about Whitehall as they crowded round her gilded coach, and exclaimed aloud upon her beauty, never doubting their outspoken flatteries would be pleasing to the lovely lady within. It was altogether too loud and garish a life for this wildwood flower, and she was never so happy as in those rare evenings which she spent alone with her husband, playing and singing to him in the little chamber overlooking the river, or sitting silent at his feet while he read and wrote.

Sometimes she fancied that he was not happy, that he had cares which he concealed from her; and on one occasion she even ventured to ask him if it were not so. But he told her no. He had no troubles which she could understand; all public life was full of care; and the state of the country was somewhat critical just now; the king careless of business, and devoted to pleasure. After this Alice wondered less when she saw her husband's brow darkened by profound thought, and never presumed to question him further.

The poor child's fears had been but too well founded. George Deverill was not happy; and the cares which oppressed him were something more than a statesman's anxiety for the welfare of his country. He could not bring himself to believe in his wife's love for him; he could not school himself to a perfect confidence in her sincerity. Doubts which had been lulled to rest for a while, for one brief halcyon period, had been reawakened lately, he scarcely knew how or why, and would not be banished. Again and again he asked himself why she should love him, what there was in his rugged nature to win the affection of a gentle girl; again and again he weighed the advantages her marriage with him secured to her, and asked himself whether any girl reared in poverty would reject such a splendid prospect. Alice Treherne's choice had been between his hand and a convent, and it was only natural that she should have preferred a wealthy husband and a title to the life-long imprisonment of the cloister. He could not have told

any one when it was that he began to brood upon these things, but the time came when they were perpetually in his mind.

He had a secretary, one Algernon Mildmay, a distant cousin, belonging to an impoverished branch of his mother's family, but who, slight as the relationship might be, was about the nearest of kin who remained to George Deverill. He was a studious young man, and devoted to his patron, gentlemanlike and not ill-looking, with a pale face that was a shade too thoughtful for one so young, a low and somewhat musical voice, and a very quiet manner. He did not live in his employer's house, but had a lodging near at hand, and came and went at all hours, letting himself in and out of the house at his own pleasure, with a private key which my lord had given him.

To this young man Lord Deverill's marriage could scarcely have been a welcome event. Without being necessarily a schemer, it would have been hardly strange if Algernon Mildmay had cherished hopes of succeeding to some part, or perhaps the whole of his kinsman's fortune. And Deverill had seemed a confirmed bachelor. But whatever the secretary may have felt, he had betrayed no sign of disappointment, and had praised the bride's beauty with an amount of enthusiasm which was unusual to his calm temperament.

There were frequent entertainments now in the stately mansion by the river, dinners and suppers, music, dancing, card-playing, and feasting after the fashion of the day. Lord Deverill stood well at court, and people were pleased to accept his hospitality, and pay homage to his fair young wife, who seemed scarcely at her ease in that gay company, and had always a plaintive look, her guests said, like one who cherished some secret sorrow.

George Deverill marked that look in the sweet face, and was ill-pleased that his wife should not take more pride and delight in her position as mistress of his house. He was not a man given to hide his anger, and he spoke bitterly of this subject one night in the presence of his secretary. There had been dancing and a banquet; but the guests were all departed, and

my lord was pacing the chief drawing-room alone, while Mr. Mildmay stood by the broad hearth where the last glimmer of light and warmth had died out of the embers, waiting to know if there were letters to be written or business to be transacted that night. He was never too tired for work, this indefatigable young secretary, but had at all times a sleepless air, as of one who wanted no rest. My lord had spoken very angrily of his wife's silence and timidity.

"'Twas well enough at first," he went on in the same angry tone. "I was not surprised to see her ill at ease among such goodly company. But 'tis time now that she showed herself worthy of the station to which I have raised her. It must not be said that my wife is unhappy, or cherishes some secret regret for having chosen me as her husband."

"That is surely impossible, my lord," said the secretary, with his smooth deferential manner and low measured tones. "Lady Deverill cannot fail to be proud of her station, and grateful for the honor you have done her."

"Grateful!" cried my lord savagely; "do you think I look for gratitude only from my wife? Do you think I do not demand something more than that from the woman I—" Some passionate expression of love was on his lips, but he checked himself abruptly, and ended coldly with, "the woman I have married?"

Algernon Mildmay, like most quiet people, was a shrewd observer. He read his master's heart almost as if it had been an open book, and saw that it would be no difficult matter to raise a storm in that haughty breast, when the fitting time came. The time had not yet come for Mr. Mildmay.

"Nay, my lord," he said, who can doubt that Lady Deverill loves you with all the ardor of a youthful heart? You will say perhaps, that you are many years her senior; but remember, you have gifts of mind and person that fully counterbalance any disparity of that kind." Carefully as he had spoken, he had said too much. His patron turned upon him fiercely.

"Nay, Master Mildmay, I did not ask you for an analysis

of my claims upon my wife's affections. I was but angry with her for her pensive looks to-night, which ill became so gay an assembly."

"Lady Deverill may perchance have pensive memories of her girlhood," pleaded the secretary, unabashed by his kinsman's reproof. "There are sad memories which will intrude even amid the mirth and music of a revel."

"Argue the point no farther, Algernon," said my lord. "I did wrong to speak unkindly of my wife in your presence. Poor child, she has done little to deserve my chiding. She is meek and obedient in all things."

Meek and obedient! Yes, did she love him? *That* was the unanswerable question for ever lurking in the depths of Lord Deverill's mind, like some monster of the briny deep floating dimly beneath dark still waters, shapeless, obscure, and horrible.

"Dotard!" muttered Algernon Mildmay, as he left the house that night; "how long is this infatuation to last?"

CHAPTER III.

MY LADY'S CONFESSOR.

It was not very long after this when Lord Deverill had occasion to leave England on a mission to Paris; a mission involving some private business of the king's, the payment of moneys borrowed during his majesty's exile, some gossips about the court said; but the messenger himself preserved an inscrutable silence even to his wife, who had, in truth, small curiosity about state matters, but seemed dejected at the thought of her lord's departure.

"I shall be lonely and dull without you, George," she said in her soft voice, clinging to him tenderly as he was about to leave the house.

He looked down at her, wondering, always wondering whether this tenderness of hers were real. Nature had cursed him with

a suspicious mind, not easily to be lulled to rest. The sweet look in those blue eyes went straight to his heart—and yet, and yet—it would be an easy matter for a woman to pretend as much as that, for the sake of a coronet, and a vast fortune, and the chance of being left by and by a wealthy widow, still in the bloom of youth.

He looked down at her, loving her with all his might, and yet not able to banish that doubt of her which was a part of his very nature.

"Nay, child," he answered gently, "you will have all you care for—your books, your color-box, and harpsichord."

"I shall not have you," she said, laying the fair young head with its rippling shower of pale golden curls upon his breast.

He sighed—a deep long sigh, kissed her on the brow, and put her gently from him. As he did so the door opened and Algernon Mildmay appeared on the threshold.

"The boatmen are ready, my lord," he said; "and the vessel sails for France in a little more than an hour. Of course they will wait for your lordship, but the tide will serve them best then."

"I am ready," Lord Deverill answered.

But his wife drew him aside into the embrasure of the window.

"Will your secretary be here in your absence, George?" she asked in a low voice.

"Why, of course, Alice; he will be free of the house. He has business to do that will keep him a good deal in my room down-stairs."

"I am sorry for that."

"Why, child? He will not intrude upon you."

"I know that. And I know it is an idle fancy—a wicked one, perhaps—that makes me dislike his presence, yes, even the idea that he is in the same house with me. Forgive me, George. He is your kinsman too, and I am bound to like him. Yet I cannot tell you what a strange fear I have of him; as if I saw written on his face, that he is destined to work some evil against me. I have felt it from the very first hour I saw him, though I

have never dared speak of it till now. But now you are going away, and I am to be left all alone, my heart sinks at the thought that he will be near me."

"Nay, Alice, this is the most childish folly; I am vexed that my wife should harbor such a silly prejudice. The young man is of my own blood, an honest gentleman, and very faithful to me, if that be any merit in your sight."

"If you love him, and can trust him, I am content," Lady Deverill answered, with a faint sigh. "Yes, I doubt not my prejudice is foolish. But women and children have such fancies, often; and they are sometimes right."

"Farewell, Alice; I have no leisure to talk of this nonsense."

And so they parted; the young wife sad at heart, the husband disturbed and irritated by his parting interview.

Had he any reason to doubt Mildmay's fidelity, he asked himself, as the rowers carried him swiftly down the stream. Nay, he had known the young man from his childhood, and had ever found him faithful and affectionate. Self-interest might have something to do with his fidelity, it is true; but what action or what sentiment in life is not governed more or less by self-interest? Lord Deverill did not believe in affection without a motive, or in gratitude for past favors unmingled with the hope of benefits to come.

"Mildmay knows that it is in my power to advance his prospects," he said to himself. "It is not likely that he would be unfaithful to me, or discourteous to my wife. And, in any case, he is a useful watch-dog; and will see that no court fops hang about Alice in my absence."

Lord Deverill was away something less than a month. The mission he had been charged with was a delicate one, involving negotiations of some length; and it was business only, and not the charm of the French capital, which kept George Deverill so long away from his wife. He wrote to her twice during his absence; but she wrote to him several times—long letters full of girlish prattle about the trifles which made her life, and breathing boundless love for her husband.

The hour came at last, a sultry, sunless twilight late in July, when the rowers went up the stream with the returning traveller. He had sent no notice of his coming home, preferring to drop unawares upon his household, and to surprise his wife, pleasantly, perhaps, pleasantly without doubt, if there were truth in those loving letters of hers. A strange eagerness to return to her had come upon him within the last day or two, an almost feverish haste and impatience; and as he drew nearer to the end of his journey that inward fever grew stronger, till it became a kind of agony.

It was an oppressive evening, a white mist brooding over the river, and almost blotting out the tall pointed roofs and slender steeples of the city; not a breath of air stirring, and a sickly yellow light upon the water, instead of the rosy glow of sunset. Such an atmosphere was enough to give a man a fever, Lord Deverill said to himself, anxious to account for that fierce heat and hurry in his blood. The light wherry shot in to the shore at last, and one of the men moored it to the lion's mouth, beside the stone landing-stair. There was another boat fastened there, with a man sitting in it fast asleep, at whom my lord stared wonderingly, not caring, however, to rouse and question him. He could learn all he wanted to know within.

There was a light in my lady's favorite chamber—a single lamp, which shone with a pale yellow radiance in the twilight —and the sound of music floated through the open window. George Deverill went quickly up the first flight of the narrow staircase with a light step, but half way up he stopped suddenly, and his face grew dark as midnight.

Mingled with the sound of the harpsichord, there came to him two voices; one of his wife's clear soprano, the other a tenor voice that was strange to him.

"So my wife has company," he said to himself angrily, "and demonstrates her sorrow for her husband's absence by singing love ditties with some strange cavalier! There was no hint of this in her letters."

He paused for a short space to listen, and then crept

stealthily upwards until he was close to the narrow door in the tapestried wall; an ill-made door, with cracks wide enough to enable a spy to see all that was taking place within the chamber.

The music had ceased. There was no little crowd of gay company in the room, such as George Deverill had expected to see. There was no one but his wife, who sat facing him, with her white arms folded listlessly upon the closed harpsichord, and a young man in a priest's dress—a young man with a fair, perfect face and flowing chestnut hair—who stood by her side, leaning with one elbow on the instrument, and looking down at her in thoughtful silence.

It was a simple group enough, and would have made a graceful unmeaning subject for a cabinet picture; but the sight, simple as it was, set George Deverill's heart beating with a murderous fury. They might have heard the throbbing, he thought, these two, had they not been so absorbed in the guilty delight of each other's company.

Guilty? Yes, Lord Deverill had no doubt of his wife's guilt. Perhaps he had always expected some such horror as this. In any case he met the calamity half way. This secret meeting—for secret he had no doubt it was; the priest's costume—a disguise, of course. Was there not evidence enough of his dishonor? To him it seemed indisputable as the mid-day sun, palpable as the earth upon which he trod.

He stood still as death at the door, looking in upon the lighted chamber through the open space beneath the clumsy upper hinge.

"And you must really return to Holland, Edward," Alice asked anxiously.

"Ay, dearest, there is no help for it," the young man answered with a sigh; "I have a home and a position yonder; here I am nothing, less than nothing; a standing shame and reproach in the eyes of one you know of. 'Tis hard to part from the one fond creature who loves me; but it would be harder to remain, and hang about you, and be nothing to you, disowned and nameless."

Alice Deverill sighed, and for some moments remained silent, playing idly with the trinkets hanging on her jewelled châtelaine—a gift from him, the outraged husband, who stood at the door watching her, with fatal thoughts busy in his brain.

"When must you start, Edward?" she asked presently.

"To-morrow night. There is a vessel sails for Rotterdam after midnight; I have made my plans to travel by that."

"Shall I see you no more, then?"

"Nay, dearest. If it be safe, I will come to you to-morrow at the usual hour."

"For the last time. And we shall never more sing the old duets that my father was so fond of in the happy days at Treherne Court. It was a foolish fancy of mine to wish to sing one of our old favorites with you to-night, was it not, Edward?"

"Rather an imprudent fancy, I own," the young man answered, smiling. "Your servants would be set wondering, if they heard you singing duets with your father confessor."

Her father confessor! Yes, the priest's cassock was a disguise; there was no trace of the tonsure on that fair young head. This man was some early lover of Alice Treherne's, some one to whom she had given her heart, but who had been too poor to claim her for his wife.

"She wanted a wealthy dupe," George Deverill said to himself; "and she found one. Once furnished with a rich husband, 'twas easy to retain the favored lover. O God, to think that smooth fair face I have idolized is but the mask of a foul, false heart!"

"The servants' quarters are too remote for them to overhear us," said Alice. "And you will come to-morrow, at the usual hour, Edward?"

"Yes, dearest. I suppose there is no chance of your husband's return before then?"

"I think not. There has been no letter to announce his coming. And even if he met you, your sacred character would prevent anything like curiosity."

"I suppose so. Good-night, my bright one."

He took her in his arms and kissed her, with the calm air of a man to whom that embrace was a matter of course, and Alice accepted his kiss with the same air. Between lovers of such old standing it was naturally so. Lord Deverill gripped his sword-hilt. Should he spring out upon him and slay him as he stood there? No; he must needs have a darker vengeance than that. And what was *he*, this nameless adventurer? Dirt, to be spurned with his foot by and by. It was she—she, the traitress—with whom he had to settle his account first.

"To-morrow will be time enough," he said to himself.

Alice opened a little casket of curious Venetian work, and took out a heap of gold, which she pressed upon her lover.

"Nay, Edward, I know that you must want money," she said, as he tried to refuse it; "and you need have no scruples in accepting this paltry gold. You cannot imagine how rich I am. My husband loads me with favors. And now, good-night; for I see you are in a hurry to be gone."

He kissed her again, and they both came towards the tapestried door. Lord Deverill drew back into the narrow passage. It was quite dark out here, and there was no fear of his being seen, even if Alice brought the lamp to light her secret visitor down-stairs, as she did presently. She stood at the top of the narrow staircase, with the lamp in her hand, till the door below closed with a grating sound, followed by the splash of oars as the boat left the shore. How lovely she looked, as she stood thus with the soft light of the lamp upon her face! Lord Deverill was startled by her beauty; it dawned upon him like a revelation, after the interval in which he had not seen her. There was something almost supernal in that fair radiant countenance, the highest charm of which was its look of perfect innocence. And yet she was false, beyond all measure false. He stood in the deep shadow of the narrow passage until Alice had returned to her room, and then crept softly to a door opening upon the gallery, which communicated with the principal rooms and with the grand staircase. All the house was wrapped in a half darkness, a solitary lamp glimmering faintly here

and there. But there was light enough for Lord Deverill, who went slowly down the shallow stairs to his favorite apartment —a spacious library upon the ground-floor, a dark and sombre chamber, out of which there opened a little room wherein the secretary was accustomed to perform his daily duties.

The library was dark, but there was a light burning in the inner room, and here my lord found Algernon Mildmay, with a dingy-looking folio volume open on the table before him, reading studiously. He looked up with a start at the sound of his patron's footsteps, and was still more startled by the ghastly pallor of the dark face, in which there was wont to be a deep crimson glow, like the lurid gleam of a stormy sunset. But he said nothing. Only his heart beat a little quicker than usual, and a voice within him asked, "Is it coming."

"This is, indeed, a pleasant surprise, my lord," he said in his courtliest tone. "I did not even hear the bustle of your arrival in the hall without, and you came upon me like a ghost."

"There was no noise in the hall. I let myself in with my own key."

"Intending to come unawares upon my Lady Deverill, no doubt. What a joyful surprise for her!"

"Yes, when we meet I doubt not that it will be—a surprise," my lord answered with a diabolical smile, and a long pause before the last two words.

"You have not seen her yet, then?"

"We have not yet met. I have a fancy for keeping the surprise a little longer. I am in the humor for a jest, you see, Mildmay. Come," he went on, flinging himself heavily into a capacious three-cornered arm-chair opposite his young kinsman, "come, sirrah, tell me how my wife has beguiled her leisure during my absence. Has she been very gay, gadding about from house to house to air her diamonds, and display the last fashion in a brocaded robe or a flounced petticoat?"

"Nay, my lord, Lady Deverill has little taste for that kind of pleasure, as I think you know. She has, indeed, a strange love of solitude, very rare in one so young. And she has an

ardent piety, which may seem a little overstrained perchance in the eyes of a man of the world like you or me, but is, nevertheless, a charming attribute in a woman. She has spent much of her time in religious exercises, I fancy, in your absence, and has been visited by her confessor every evening for the last fortnight."

"Her confessor! What, the old French priest from the queen-dowager's chapel?"

"No, my lord. This is a young man, a Frenchman also, I conclude; for on the few occasions when I have met him on the stairs, he has spoken to me in that language."

"Indeed! And he has been with my lady every evening? I did not think she had so many sins to confess. Has this priest been favored with lengthy interviews?"

"Nay, my lord, I cannot answer for the period of his visits. He has used the water staircase. I have seen his boat waiting there sometimes, when I have left the house by that way myself."

"At what hour?"

"I have seldom gone away until ten o'clock."

"A late hour for confession, truly. Perchance the holy father is with her now. I will not run the risk of interrupting their pious exercises."

"But, my lord, your coming can hardly seem untimely, let it happen when it will. Lady Deverill must needs be rejoiced by your return.

"Perhaps. But it is my fancy not to disturb her. Besides, it would be but a meeting and a parting in the same hour. I am in England only as a bird of passage. I sleep in the city to-night, and sail for Antwerp at day-break. I have business of moment to settle in the Netherlands."

"Private business of his majesty's, my lord?"

"Of the king's? Yes."

"You have been at Whitehall, then, to-night, my lord?"

"I have received my orders, sir," Lord Deverill answered sternly. "This mission is a matter that lies between his

majesty and myself. I permit no one to play the spy upon my affairs."

The secretary murmured a humble apology.

"Let me accompany you to your lodgings in the city, my lord?" he asked. "I may be of some use to you."

"No, there is nothing you can do for me—except keep the secret of my presence here to-night. Not a word, mind, to Lady Deverill. I sleep at the Green Dragon—good-night."

"Let me see you to the door, my lord."

"No, keep your seat. I want no fuss or noise."

The secretary waited, listening breathlessly till he heard the sound of the hall-door closed with a cautious hand. Then he crept through the dark library, and out into the hall where it was almost dark, and stood there behind a stone column listening intently. Yes, in the gallery above he heard the sound of a man's footstep, stealthy, but distinctly audible in the utter stillness of the house.

Algernon Mildmay crept up the staircase with light swift steps. He was just in time to see a figure disappear through a dimly-lighted archway at the end of the gallery—a tall stalwart form that was familiar to him, the figure of George, Baron Deverill.

He followed, still very cautiously, and prepared to dart into the embrasure of a door, should his patron turn. He followed to the foot of the second staircase, and saw Lord Deverill mounting before him, mounting to the third story of that spacious mansion. On this third floor there was a range of bed-chambers rarely occupied, and above these the garrets of the servants.

Algernon Mildmay heard his kinsman open the door of one of the empty rooms, and close it after him. Then all was silent; and after listening on the dark landing for nearly a quarter of an hour, the secretary went softly down stairs.

"So this is what his lordship meant by sleeping at the Green Dragon. There is a storm brewing, I fancy; a tempest which will sweep that fair-faced doll from the pinnacle to which my

dotard cousin has elevated her. Is she false to him, I wonder? Who knows? Enough for me, if he thinks her so. And that handsome young priest would serve to make a dozen middle-aged husbands jealous. A man has no business to marry at fifty years of age. 'Tis a deliberate wrong to his next of kin. And so he means to spend the night in hiding up yonder; and in that case how about sailing at daybreak for Antwerp? Has he seen the king to-night, and is he charged with any mission in the Netherlands? No, I would wager my chances of the Deverill inheritance that those are lies. Has he seen those two, my lady and her priest, I wonder? There was that in his face which meant mischief when he came in—a murderous look. Yes, I will lay my life he has seen them."

And musing thus, Mr. Mildmay went slowly back to his little study, and sat there, brooding and listening, till late into the night. There was a pale streak of daylight in the east when he left the house, and walked back to his lodgings through the quiet streets.

CHAPTER IV.

MY LORD AVENGES HIMSELF.

It was between nine and ten o'clock upon the night after Lord Deverill's return, and a night of storm and tempest, when a tall figure with a masked face took its stand in the narrow passage behind my lady's favorite chamber. There came the sound of voices from within—youthful voices, which the listener knew too well; but to-night he could not hear their words; for Alice Deverill and her companion were standing at the open window watching the storm, and the noise of the wind and rain drowned the low murmur of their voices.

There was a fragile rowing-boat moored to the lion's head below, but no boatman. The mock priest was skilled in the use of the oars, and had rowed across the river from his obscure Surrey lodging before the storm began. He was watching the sky now, admiringly rather than anxiously, and

a cry of rapture broke from his lips every now and then when the vivid lightning flashed across river and city with a tremulous blue light that gave an unearthly aspect to that familiar scene.

The masked listener, peering in at the lamp-lit room presently through the crevice in the door, fancied that Alice was pleading with her visitor, entreating him not to leave her while the storm was raging. She clung to him with pretty beseeching gestures —those tender winning ways the watcher knew so well—looking up at him the while. He smiled at her fears, laughed even, as if to reassure her, then bent to kiss the fair brow, snatched up his hat, and turned towards the door.

"Nay, my sweet one, there is nothing to fear," he said in a louder voice, with his hand upon the door. "I have been used to all weathers. I shall be on the opposite bank in five minutes, and safe at my lodging in ten. Good-night, and God guard thee, pretty one. It may be long before you and I meet again."

"Ay," muttered the figure lurking in the shadow of the wall, "thou sayest truly, traitor; it may be long."

Alice Deverill brought the lamp to the doorway; but the door below giving on the water was open, and there was a wind upon the staircase that would have extinguished twenty lamps. In a moment they were in darkness.

"Go back and light your lamp, child," said the young man, pushing her gently into the room, and shutting the door upon her.

He ran lightly down the stairs, close followed by the masked watcher. In the doorway above the river a powerful hand gripped him by the neck, and flung him round suddenly. It was too dark for him to see his assailant. He tried to draw his sword; in vain; that unknown enemy seemed to have a giant's strength. He gave one hoarse cry for help, and in the next moment was flung down into the empty boat, stabbed to the heart.

The assassin cut the rope with his dagger, and pushed the

boat out into the stream. On such a night it was scarce likely that any one had heard that one half-stifled cry for help. The murderer's grasp had been upon the victim's throat when the death shriek was uttered.

He walked slowly up the stairs, wiping his poniard on the velvet sleeve of his doublet as he went. He opened the door of the little tapestried room, and went in, an awful figure, with the face hidden, and a dagger grasped in the strong right hand, the lace ruffle torn from the bony wrist, and the velvet sleeve pushed upward to give free play to that murderous hand.

When he entered the room Alice Deverill was on her knees before a small statue of the virgin, niched in an angle of the wall. She rose at the sound of the opening door, and turned her face towards it. At the sight of that ghastly figure she gave a feeble cry, and recoiled, tottering, to the opposite wall.

The intruder uttered no word. He strode across the little room and laid a heavy hand—his left hand—upon the girl's bare shoulder.

"What, hypocrite," he said, "do you pray? That is, indeed, a blasphemy! You were praying for your lover's safety, perchance? Wasted breath, wench! He has gone upon the last long journey. Would'st like to follow him?"

"Lord Deverill!" cried the girl, recognising her husband's voice, altered as it was by passion; "what madness is this? My lover! I have no lover."

"What, not the mock priest who left you two minutes ago? Nay, 'tis easy enough for such trash to lie. But I did not come to talk. Thy last lie is spoken, girl."

He wound one powerful arm round the slender figure, took her to his breast in that last embrace, and plunged the dagger home to her heart as surely as he had pierced that of her late visitor.

"She would have won me to believe her lies, if I had let her talk," he muttered to himself. "I am weaker than water where she is concerned."

He held her in his arms still. He kissed the pale dead face —not once, but many times—more passionately than he had

ever kissed it in life, when he had been too proud to reveal the intensity of his love.

He held the lifeless form for a long time, his mask flung aside now, looking down at the fair face with unspeakable woe, and yet some touch of pride in the thought that he had avenged himself. At last he roused himself from that profound reverie, laid his dead wife gently down upon a couch, and then began to make an end of his work.

He broke open caskets and cabinets, and crammed his pockets with their glittering contents. It was his business to make this deed seem the crime of a midnight robber. He scattered letters and papers on the floor, ransacked drawers and jewel-cases, until his pockets were heavy with their plunder. It was at the last moment that he stooped to pick up a letter which had fallen to the ground among the rest—a letter which attracted his eye because the superscription was in his dead friend Sir Talbot Treherne's hand-writing. A curious superscription, too :

"*To my daughter Alice.*

"To be opened after my death.

TALBOT TREHERNE."

Lord Deverill had no time to read the letter. He thrust it into his breast, and crept softly away from the room, where the servants might come at any moment to inquire for their mistress's final orders before retiring for the night.

In the gallery and on the staircase all was still. My lord resumed his mask before going down-stairs, and looked cautiously over the banisters. There was no one in the hall. He went softly down, unfastened the heavy bolts and chains of the great door, and let himself out into the rain and darkness, reckless of the storm.

He went on foot to the City in spite of the rain, which never ceased in all that weary walk. He spent the night at that hostelry of which he had spoken to his secretary, and where he had sent his luggage on arriving from France. He spent the brief summer night at this Green Dragon—a hideous sleepless

night, in which his wife's dead face was always before his eyes.

Was he sorry for what he had done? No, not sorry. He loved his wife as passionately as ever, and regretted her with a desperate anguish. But he did not repent. Had the deed been to do again he would have done it, deeming the blood of those two guilty ones the sole possible atonement for his wrong.

At daybreak he was on board the Antwerp packet; a fair summer morning, unspeakably serene and tranquil after the tempest. What a lovely calm without, what a fierce tumult within, as George Deverill stood upon the deck watching the towers and steeples of the great city melt into the cloudless blue of that summer heaven!

It was not till the vessel had passed the Kentish hills and was out in the open sea that my lord remembered that letter in his breast-pocket, and took it out to read with a half-listless curiosity. What could its contents signify to him? They could not make his dead wife an honest woman, or restore to him one of those lost hopes which had brightened his life a little while ago.

The letter ran thus:

"The secret I am about to confide in you, Alice, is one that I have guarded jealously for five-and-twenty years of my life; and I charge you, as you value your soul, to keep it as jealously to your dying day; ay, even from your husband, should you marry, as it is but likely you will ere long.

"That Edward Harmer, whom you have called cousin, and loved with a cousinly, nay, indeed, sisterly affection, which it has pleased me well to see, is no distant kinsman, orphan son of a poor and humble relation, as I have taught you to believe. He is something nearer and dearer, Alice; he is your half-brother; my son, born out of wedlock some four years before my marriage with your mother; my son, by a lady of such exalted rank, that the revelation of this secret would be death to more than one. My boy's mother still lives, and holds a lofty station at the court, having many years ago married a gentle

man, her equal in rank and in fortune. Edward knows this, and is willing that his own existence should be an obscure one, spent in a foreign land, rather than cause the shadow of danger to the mother whose voice he has never heard, whose lips have never kissed him. Of my sin I need not speak here. It is a sin that ever comes back to the wrongdoer, and it has been a source of bitterness to me for many weary years; but, alas, the burden weighs most heavily on the innocent.

"You, Alice, when I am gone, will be my son's only friend; or, at least, the sole being with whom he may claim the tender tie of kindred. Be kind to him, my beloved daughter; and should Fate raise you to a position of wealth or power, do him whatever service you can. You know that he has a brave and noble spirit, and has loved you fondly from his boyhood. Be kind to him for my sake; and think that, in the unknown country to which I go, your father's ghost looks back upon you with fond regretful eyes, and blesses you.

"Farewell, dear child; I have but this single request to make to one who has been ever dutiful and affectionate, and whom Heaven will surely reward in the days to come."

This was all. George Deverill sat with the letter in his hand, like a man spell-bound by some strange dream. Then, after a long interval of this strange stillness, he rose and slowly paced the deck, thinking of the useless murder that he had done.

His wife was innocent; the woman he had loved was pure and spotless after all. There was a rapture in that thought, which even the memory of his crime could scarcely lessen. She was dead, lost to him forever; but she was not "a liar, gone to burning hell." She was an angelic victim, for whom he could weep without shame.

There was clamor and confusion in the house by the river when Alice Deverill's untimely fate was known. The crime was attributed at once to some common robber, who had discovered by some means how my lady kept her jewels in that chamber, and had laid his plans accordingly. Algernon Mildmay, who

was present at all the investigations and discussions that followed the discovery of the murder, took pains to press this view of the case; though he had his own thoughts upon the subject, and those pointed to that secret guest who had spent a night hidden in one of the unused chambers on the third story. But this gentleman knew that, if his patron suffered as a felon, his patron's fortune would be escheated to the Crown; and he was very anxious to spare my Lord Deverill the shame of a public trial for murder, to be followed by the scaffold.

The fact that on the night of Lady Deverill's murder a man, stabbed to death, had been found drifting down the Thames in open boat, attracted little notice. Midnight assassinations were common enough in that golden age, and no one thought of connecting these two crimes.

Lord Deverill lived abroad for ten years, wandering from city to city, and leading a life of wild riot and dissipation, which would have exhausted even a larger fortune than his own. At the end of that time he came suddenly home—a haggard-looking man, with white hair—and gave himself up to the law as a double murderer.

The preliminary examinations proceeded slowly; for magistrates and lawyers were inclined to think this self-accused man a monomaniac. He had as much difficulty in proving his guilt as he could have had in demonstrating his innocence; and he was remanded from time to time, while there was an attempt made to procure independent evidence.

He was never brought to trial. They found him dead in his prison one morning, sitting at a table with a lighted candle still burning before him, and his wife's miniature in his hand. He died penniless. There was nothing—neither house nor land—for Algernon Mildmay to inherit. That gentleman prospered in life, nevertheless, and rose to a distinguished position in diplomacy.

MR. AND MRS. DE FONTENOY.

THE season at St. Dunstans-by-the-Sea is not a long one, and St. Dunstans is not the gayest of English watering places; but, in default of any boisterous gaiety, St. Dunstans enjoys the distinction of being eminently select and fashionable. No vulgar cockneys ever trouble the quiet of the esplanade, or jostle their betters in the smart little shops in the High-street; there are no greasy-looking eating-houses devoted to excursionists, no obtrusive public-houses or cheap concert-halls. There is a fragmentary hundred yards or so of a pier, unfinished for want of funds, where a band plays twice a week in the season; there are two hotels—one on the esplanade, and fabulously expensive; the other in a less fashionable quarter, but almost as dear. Beyond these, there is a splendid building erected by a company, and, like the pier, unfinished, which did at one time threaten to annihilate the two existing hotels, but which came to a dismal collapse, and offers itself for sale to any aspiring speculator who may happen to pass that way.

About half a mile's length of the usual stuccoed houses, with plate-glass windows and fragile balconies, face the sea, and at one end of the esplanade there is a little cluster of those bow-windowed dwellings, of a much earlier date, that are always suggestive of snugness and comfort. Around and about the town there are a great many pretty villas with gardens, the

larger number of which are offered annually for the accommodation of visitors; villas in every style of architecture, from the simplest rustic to the ornate Italian gothic. Conspicuous among these, there is a house that overlooks the sea from a commanding position upon the road that rises from the esplanade to the cliff—a house built by a rich merchant for his own occupation, but never occupied by him, and sold at a great loss to a local house agent, who had furnished it in a gaudy meretricious kind of way, and had hitherto been successful in letting it every year at a very handsome rental. The house was built in the mediæval gothic style, with castellated roof, narrow windows, arched gateways, winding stairs, octagon chambers in turrets, and all manner of awkward corners and waste spaces at every turn; but the natives of St. Dunstans-by-the-Sea believed in the mansion as a triumph of architecture, and the tenants of Boisgilbert Hall were always regarded in a most exalted light by the tradespeople and other inhabitants of the select watering-place. The house was altogether the largest and most important in the neighborhood; and it was supposed that any one taking it must needs be the owner of a very handsome income. If an humbler customer complained of the quality of goods dispensed to him, the tradesmen of St. Dunstans were apt to reply that the gentry at Boisgilbert Hall had consumed large quantities of those very goods, and had found them excellent. To serve Boisgilbert Hall was a warrant of excellence, in the minds of the St. Dunstans traders.

When Mr. Migson, the auctioneer, had owned the gothic mansion about four years ago, there came rather a dull season for St. Dunstans, and throughout the months of June and July Boisgilbert Hall remained tenantless. To the local gossips this seemed almost as much a loss as to Mr. Migson himself. At church the dresses and bonnets from Boisgilbert Hall had always afforded a delightful distraction during the hot summer mornings; on the esplanade the tenants of Boisgilbert Hall had been followed by admiring looks and hushed whispers. They were always carriage people, of course, and had generally

daughters who rode a good deal, to the delight of the local rid ing-master, and bathed a good deal, and promenaded the esplanade in the freshest morning toilets under convoy of a grim-looking governess.

When August began, and the gothic halls were still empty, Mr. Migson's heart grew cold with the agony of despair. He rushed into wild expenses in the way of advertising, and an ornate description of Boisgilbert Hall appeared daily in the London *Times*. Two or three letters of inquiry as to terms reached him in response to these advertisements; but the inquires were apparently discomfited by the amount which he demanded for the hire of his gothic paradise, for he heard no more of them. He began to contemplate his mansion with despondent looks as he loitered in the garden smoking his solitary cigar, with his hands in his pockets, after his day's work; and at his nightly club at the Prince of Wales's Feathers he informed his friends that the financial prosperity of England was on the wane.

He had almost abandoned all hope of letting his house this year, and was thinking of discontinuing his advertisement in the *Times*, when a letter of a hopeful and imposing appearance greeted him among his daily correspondence—a monster square cream-colored envelope, with the signature "De Fontenoy" scrawled in the corner, as if the writer thereof had been a cabinet minister, accustomed to the free transit of his letters by virtue of his name. The seal was a splendid combination of arms and monogram in gold and color; the crest, a rising sun; the motto, "I dare." Mr. Migson opened the envelope in a flutter of expectation. Such a missive could mean only one thing—an application for Boisgilbert Hall. He was right; the Honorable Mr. de Fontenoy presented his compliments to Mr. Migson, and begged to know the rent of the house at St. Dunstans for six months certain, with right to continue.

If the terms were approved, Mr. de Fontenoy's house-steward would come immediately to inspect the accommodation, and decide whether it would be adequate to the requirements of the

family. Mr. Migson was requested to fix his terms in a moderate and conscientious spirit, as Mr. de Fontenoy's household, although extensive, was conducted upon principles of strict economy.

This looked well—so different from the proverbial recklessness of swindlers. Mr. Migson answered the letter immediately, putting his terms at the lowest possible figure, and then waited with an anxious mind for the result. Mr. de Fontenoy's London address was Grosvenor square; in itself a pledge of respectability, nay, indeed, of aristocracy. The auctioneer consulted his peerage, and found that De Fontenoy was the family name of Viscount Malplaquet, and that his lordship's town mansion was in Grosvenor square. Mr. de Fontenoy no doubt resided with his distinguished parent when in town. And yet this seemed scarcely consistent with the fact of his having a house-steward of his own.

Early on the following day the house-steward made his appearance in Mr. Migson's office—a man of imposing aspect and most gentlemanlike manners. He inspected Boisgilbert Hall from cellar to garret—he was especially curious about the cellarage, which was very spacious, remarking that Mr. de Fontenoy was particular as to the atmosphere in which his wines were kept—he found a good deal of fault with the rooms, in an affable kind of way; but after being softened by a very good dinner, which Mr. Migson invited him to partake of at the Prince of Wales's Feathers, with a bottle of good old port and a dish of nectarines to follow, he pronounced that the house would do.

"I shall tell Mr. de Fontenoy that he can't do better than come to St. Dunstans, though the place does seem a little dull," he said. "I've a good deal of influence with him, you know, Mr. Migson, though he's very haughty and reserved in general; and I can generally get him to do what I want. I have been in his family for the last twenty years."

"Indeed! Is Mr. de Fontenoy's family large?" asked the auctioneer, with an eye to possible destruction of his furni-

ture by the hands of juvenile members of the new tenant's household.

"O dear, no; there are no children. Mr. and Mrs. de Fontenoy have only been married a year. She was a Russian prince's daughter—most accomplished creature; speaks very little English; father rolling in money, which must all come to my master when he dies."

"You spoke just now of being twenty years in the family," said Mr. Migson; "I suppose you were with Lord Malplaquet before his son married?"

"Precisely. When the young gentleman was going to marry, he said to his father, 'Remember, dad, as soon as ever I get a house of my own, I must have Richards.' 'It'll be an awful sacrifice for me,' answers the old lord; 'but I suppose you must have him:' and so the business was settled. I have the entire management of Mr. de Fontenoy's establishment, and, I may say, the entire disposal of his income; for he leaves everything in my hands, and asks my advice upon every subject."

"Is he rich?"

"Well, no, not at present—not for a man in his position. His income is only a little over seven thousand a-year; and he spends every penny of it."

Mr. Migson rubbed his hands briskly; seven thousand a-year had a very comfortable sound; and he wished he had asked a pound or two more, when he named the weekly rent.

"You'll be wanting wines and spirits, I suppose," he said presently, as Mr. Richards sipped his port. "I do a little in that way myself, on commission; and I shall be very glad to secure the opportunity. You may rely upon my supplying everything of first-class quality."

The urbane Mr. Richards called for pen and ink, and dashed off a list of wines and spirits that astonished, as much as it gratified, the auctioneer. The amount of brandy was considerably in excess of the wine; but the steward remarked, in an explanatory way, that his master had a great many bachelor friends, who consumed unlimited brandy-and-soda.

After this Mr. Richards returned to town, parting from his new acquaintance in a most cordial manner, and appointing the following Monday for the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. de Fontenoy.

Early on that day Lord Malplaquet's son and daughter-in law were duly deposited at the neat little station, with such an array of luggage as did not often encumber the platform ; trunks and portmanteaus innumerable, deal cases of prodigious size, travelling-bags, desks, and dressing cases, emerged one after another from the luggage-van, and loaded as many flies as could be obtained at the station ; three footmen in quiet gray liveries, and a stalwart individual who looked like a coachman, assisted in the removal of this luggage, and drove off in three of the flies in company with a couple of respectable-looking women-servants. Mr. Richards was there also, in close attendance upon his master, Mr. de Fontenoy, who had rather a foreign look, and wore a moustache and beard that quite concealed the lower part of his face; his wife was a slim little woman, with a pale face and hay-colored hair, not a pretty woman by any means, but with a very winning voice and manner; she was dressed with elegant simplicity, and the inhabitants of St. Dunstans, who had heard a good deal about the De Fontenoys from Mr. Migson, decided that her appearance was eminently aristocratic, and did credit to the lineage of her princely papa. The loiterers about the railway-station were sorry when a close fly hid Mrs. de Fontenoy's pale face from their admiring gaze, and opined that she did not often drive in so humble a vehicle. They wondered that the train had not brought any carriage or horses for the De Fontenoys, and supposed that those luxuries would speedily follow them.

For an hour or so after the arrival, Mr. Richards, the steward, might have been seen pervading the little town, ordering butcher's meat and poultry, fish, vegetables, grocery and confectionery, on rather an extensive scale. But he impressed on the tradesmen that they were on no account to attempt to take advantage of Mr. de Fontenoy's position, for he would stand no imposition of that kind.

"I know what you watering-place shopkeepers are," he said, "and what a way you have of bumping your prices up when you've secured a good customer; but that sort of thing won't do with me. I examine every account with the utmost strictness; and I never took sixpence from a tradesman by way of percentage in my life."

The shopkeepers promised that their accounts should be rendered in the most honorable spirit, and declared that it should go hard with them if they did not prove themselves worthy of Mr. de Fontenoy's confidence. It had ever been their proudest privilege to serve the gentry at Boisgilbert Hall, they added, and they had always been so fortunate as to give entire satisfaction.

"I'm very glad to hear it," replied Mr. Richards sternly; "but you've got a sharp customer to deal with now, remember, and don't try on any of your usual tricks."

He left the tradespeople subdued, but gratified. His orders had been large; and the new household at Boisgilbert Hall seemed likely to consume more than any previous family.

Throughout the following week there was much talk in St. Dunstans about the De Fontenoys. They went out less, and were altogether more exclusive in their habits, than any family who had ever occupied Boisgilbert Hall. St Dunstans languished to behold the fair descendant of Russian princes; but neither on the pier nor the esplanade, neither driving nor riding, was the Honorable Mrs. de Fontenoy to be seen. People who had seen her at the station by and by explained this by the suggestion that she was in all probability an invalid, and not strong enough to go out of doors; but if that were so, there would have been a necessity for a doctor, and no medical practitioner had crossed the threshold of Boisgilbert Hall since the advent of the De Fontenoys. The St. Dunstans gossips were disappointed in Mrs. de Fontenoy for showing herself so little among them, and were inclined to resent her exclusiveness.

It seemed, indeed, as if Mr. de Fontenoy and all his set entertained a rooted aversion to daylight. The bachelor friends of

whom the steward had spoken came and went, and drank copiously of that first-class French brandy supplied by Mr. Migson, and made away with more cigars than the St. Dunstans tobacconist had ever before sold to one customer; but neither they nor their host ever showed themselves in the broad light of day. How they disposed of their leisure in those bright autumn days no one in the town could imagine. There was a billiard-table, which Mr. de Fontenoy had hired from the chief upholsterer of the town, who had to procure it expressly from London: but the gentlemen did not play billiards all day, for Mr. Migson, calling unexpectedly one afternoon on some little matter of business, had been admitted by one of the two women-servants, and had seen through the open door that the room used for billiards was quite empty; nor did he see any of the gentlemen, or hear the faintest sound of voices or laughter throughout the house. He was shown into a little room in one of the turrets, and was kept there waiting some time before Mr. de Fontenoy came to him, looking very much overcome by the heat. He had been asleep on the sofa in his bedroom, he said, and he wiped the perspiration from his forehead as he made this avowal. Mr. Migson was a little puzzled as to what had become of the three gray footmen, not one of whom appeared during his visit.

Late in the evening, Mr. de Fontenoy and his friends were often to be seen on the esplanade, smoking their eternal cigars, and staring lazily at the sea. The gentlemen were for the most part bearded, and had a foreign look, like their host. They had rather a martial swagger, and it was popularly supposed that they were officers belonging to crack cavalry regiments.

Time passed; but the interest felt by the inhabitants of St. Dustans in the De Fontenoys was in no manner abated. The extreme seclusion of their habits did much to maintain public curiosity. Mrs. de Fontenoy attended church every Sunday morning with rigid punctuality; and it was thought very nice of her to be a Protestant, and always in such good time for the morning service. She came alone, that is to say, attended only

by one of the gray footmen; and it was opined that Mr. de Fontenoy was sadly deficient in religious feeling. Her dress, on these solitary occasions of her public appearance, was always in perfect taste, and excited much admiration among the feminine part of the congregation. Several of the leading families of St. Dunstans—the doctor and his wife, the lawyer and his lady, two maiden ladies—daughters of a late rector—had called at Boisgilbert Hall, and had been received by Mrs. de Fontenoy, whom they pronounced a very charming person, a little diffident and retiring, but all the more interesting on that account. Mr. de Fontenoy was not so popular. His manners were considered rather brusque, and his non-attendance at church was against him. He had, however, shown himself very hospitable, in a rough-and-ready military kind of way, and had invited the morning-callers to luncheon; but neither he nor his wife returned the calls, and the acquaintance went no farther. "There was a something indefinable—which the lawyer's wife and the two maiden ladies described as a "painful deficiency"—in Mr. de Fontenoy: not to be wondered at, when it was considered that he never went to church.

Time passed. Boisgilbert Hall had been taken for six months, the rent to be paid at the end of that term. Mr. Migson would have preferred receiving it monthly, as he was not a rich man; but the steward had explained to him that this was not possible, as the tenants on Mr. de Fontenoy's estate paid their rents half-yearly, and all his own payments were made in that manner.

To this the auctioneer had of course submitted; and now the end of the half-year was drawing near, and Mr. Migson rubbed his hands, in a comfortable self-congratulatory kind of way, as he reflected how soon he should touch his money.

He was destined to be awakened rather roughly from this complacent state of mind. Reading his newly arrived *Times* one forenoon, in the studious leisure of his office, where business at this dreary season of the year was rather slack, he came upon a paragraph that affected him after the manner of a sudden application of the ice-treatment to his spine. An awful chill

crept along the spinal cord, and a species of paralysis seemed for the moment to annihilate the thinking power of his brain.

"His only son!" he murmured feebly, "his only son!"

The paragraph announced the death of Hector Angus de Fontenoy, only son of Lord Malplaquet, from an accident while deer-stalking in the Scottish highlands.

Now if Lord Malplaquet had only one son, who was the gentleman known to Mr. Migson as the Honorable Mr. de Fontenoy? To the mind of the horror-stricken auctioneer there arose only one solution of this mystery. In spite of the three gray footmen, the house-steward, and all the appliances of state, the De Fontenoys of Boisgilbert Hall were a set of swindlers, and he, Mr. Migson, had been done.

"It may be a mistake of the reporter's," he thought, and then applied himself to his peerage. No, Lord Malplaquet had only one son, and that son's name was Hector Angus. What was to be done? The auctioneer sat before his desk for a long time, trying to think, in a helpless kind of way. There was only one source of consolation amidst the hopelessness of his meditations. So much luggage as the De Fontenoys had brought with them could not be spirited away very easily from such a place as St. Dunstans, especially in the blank month of January, when every arrival at, or departure from, the little station was an event of importance, every detail of which afforded subject for conversation. If Mr. de Fontenoy were a swindler, he carried with him much more impedimenta than swindlers are apt to be encumbered with. But then, on the other hand, Mr. Migson reflected that all those boxes and cases might be mere representative luggage, stage-properties, phantasmal similitudes, which would turn out by and by to contain only straw and brickbats. No, there was no security to be derived from the luggage. Mr. de Fontenoy's intention was, in all probability, to levant just before the expiry of the half-year, carrying with him everything valuable that he might happen to possess, and leaving the phantasmal boxes that had helped him to throw dust in the eyes of his victims.

To prevent this, Mr. Migson determined on an immediate course of action. He wrote to a retired detective officer, the chief of a private-inquiry office, giving a full description of his tenants, and asking if any such persons were known amongst the ranks of professional swindlers; and after having posted this letter with his own hand, he walked at once to Boisgilbert Hall, carrying the *Times* newspaper in his pocket.

He was admitted by one of the footmen in gray, a tall and stalwart individual, who contemplated him from head to foot with the supercilious stare peculiar to his class. Mr. de Fontenoy was at home, and disengaged. Mr. Migson was ushered to the dining-room, where he found that gentleman seated before the fire wrapped in a gorgeous cashmere dressing-gown, and reading a French newspaper, with a cigar in his mouth and his feet on the fender.

"Sit down, Migson," he said cordially. "Jones, bring a bottle of the Amontillado. Confoundedly disagreeable weather! This place of yours seems to have a proprietorial interest in the north-east wind; I never knew it blow so incessantly anywhere else. Well, Migson, what's the news in St. Dunstans? Anything stirring?"

"Well, no, sir; St. Dunstans is apt to be quiet at this time of year. But I—ahem—the fact is—that is to say—the purport of my visit this morning is—"

"Out with it, my good fellow!" exclaimed Mr. de Fontenoy briskly; "don't be shy. I suppose the fact is, you looked in to see that things are going on all right—no ill-usage of the furniture, and so on. You are quite at liberty to take a look round the house, if you like; you'll find everything in apple-pie order. Take a cigar, and help yourself to the Amontillado."

"Thank you, no, sir; I never smoke in the morning. The truth is, I have been a little put out of sorts by a paragraph in to-day's *Times*; and I considered it was the best plan to come straight to you and ask for an explanation of it."

"I don't see what there can be in the *Times* to require any explanation from me," answered Mr. de Fontenoy, staring his

visitor full in the face with a puzzled look. "However, I haven't seen this morning's papers, so I'm quite in the dark. What is it?"

Mr. Migson unfolded the paper with a solemn countenance, and placed it in his tenant's hands, with one finger pointing to the fatal paragraph.

"Yes," said Mr. de Fontenoy, after glancing carelessly at the lines, "very sad, isn't it? Poor young fellow! I had a letter from Scotland, announcing the fatal event, this morning. I have not ventured to tell my wife about it yet. My poor cousin was a great favorite of hers."

"Your cousin, Mr. de Fontenoy?"

"Yes, my first cousin—Hector, son of the late Lord Malplaquet, my uncle. Why how you stare, Migson! O, I see this paragraph omits the word 'late' before his father's name. Very stupid of those penny-a-liner fellows, to be sure!"

"Then your father is the present lord, Mr. de Fontenoy?"

"Of course; I thought you had been told that."

"Well, yes, sir; but if this Mr. Hector de Fontenoy is your cousin, how is it he didn't succeed to the title after his father, in the usual way?"

"Political services, Mr. Migson. In our family the title passes from brother to brother. It's rather a peculiar arrangement, arising from the special circumstances under which the title was bestowed upon my great-grandfather, the first Lord Malplaquet."

Mr. de Fontenoy's easy manner was reassuring; but the auctioneer was not convinced. Are not swindlers usually renowned for their easy manners?

"The fact of the matter is, sir," said Mr. Migson, "it has been a very great inconvenience to me waiting six months for my rent; and if you could come to a settlement with me now—it wants only five weeks to the half year—I should esteem it a favor."

Mr. de Fontenoy flung away his cigar, and drew himself up sternly.

"Mr. Migson," he exclaimed, turning fiercely on the auctioneer, "this unwarranted application is prompted by a low suspicion, inspired by that paragraph. You presume to doubt my claim to the position which I occupy and the name I bear. This is too much, sir. I shall pay you your rent to-morrow at noon, in sterling coin of the realm; no, sir, I shall not offer you a cheque, the validity of which you might venture to suspect; I shall pay you and all other claimants in gold. I shall not wait for my Irish rents; I shall telegraph to my bankers for a reserve which I happen to have at my disposal, and I shall leave your house at two o'clock to-morrow."

This was said with a grandeur of tone and manner that overawed the poor little auctioneer. Was it possible he had offended a substantial tenant, who would have been a source of permanent profit, but for his untimely suspicion? He stammered out a feeble apology, assuring Mr. de Fontenoy that his application had been prompted only by his own necessities.

"Do not waste trouble upon apologies, sir," answered his tenant with undiminished fierceness; "I am of a temper that never forgives an insult. At two o'clock to-morrow I quit your house. If you have any doubt as to my proceedings in the interval, you had better set a watch upon these premises, in order to assure yourself that nothing is removed." He rang the bell, which was answered immediately by one of the footmen.

"Send Richards to me," he said.

While the auctioneer was still faltering his apologies, Mr. Richards appeared, grave and deferential of manner in the presence of his master.

"Richards, you will go round to the tradesmen, and tell them to send their accounts in before six o'clock this evening, and you will devote your evening to the examination of them; you will also be good enough to telegraph to the Union, telling them to send me down fifteen hundred in gold. I suppose that amount will about cover our accounts here, including Mr. Migson's rent?"

"About that, I think, sir."

"Good; and, Richards, you will see that everything is packed by to-morrow at twelve."

"Yes, sir."

"That is all. You may show Mr. Migson to the door."

In the hall the auctioneer begged for a few words with his good friend Mr. Richards, and, taking that gentleman by the buttonhole, told him how he had been so unlucky as to offend Mr. de Fontenoy. Could not Mr. Richards make matters right?

The steward shook his head with a decided negative. "Impossible," he said. "My master has a very unbending temper, and if he has once decided on a thing, there's nothing will move him from it. I saw by his face that there was something wrong directly I came into the room. What a pity you offended him? Now, if you had applied to me in the first instance, as you ought to have done, I could have got you the money without the slightest difficulty."

Mr. Migson regretted his want of diplomacy. It would have been better in every way to have sounded the steward first. He went back to his office terribly crestfallen. He did not attempt to keep any watch upon Boisgilbert Hall, as Mr. de Fontenoy had suggested, but he sent his clerk to hang about the station, in order to make sure that there was no premature departure therefrom on the part of his tenants. At his club that evening he found himself a subject of reproach from his fellow-tradesmen, who had heard from the steward that Mr. de Fontenoy was leaving St. Dunstans solely on account of his landlord's insulting doubt of his position.

As the St. Dunstans clocks struck twelve next day, all the shopkeepers who had served Boisgilbert Hall presented themselves at that mansion, according to the appointment made by Mr. Richards, the steward. With them came Mr. Migson, very subdued of aspect. They were received in the dining-room, where Mr. de Fontenoy was lounging in front of the fire, with his hands in the pockets of his morning-coat, and a cigar between his lips as usual. He acknowledged the respectful

salutations of the tradespeople with a haughty nod. Mr. Richards was seated at one end of the long dining-table, with an array of gold spread out before him, in little glittering piles of tens and twenties. It made the mouths of the St. Dunstans dealers water, to look at all that shining specie. It was like being in a bank.

"I am sorry to leave you so abruptly, my good people," said Mr. de Fontenoy, in sharp decisive tones; "but I am a man of peculiar temper, and I never forgive an insult. The owner of this house presumed to question my right to the name I bear—a name which, I need not remind you, adorns the peerage of this realm. Such insolence on his part left me no alternative. I could not, in justice to myself, inhabit a house belonging to a man who could so outrage my self-respect. As there happens to be no other house in your little town suitable to the requirements of my household, I had no resource but to leave St. Dunstans. My trunks are packed, and we quit this place by the two o'clock train—Richards, be so kind as to give these good people their money."

Mr. de Fontenoy lit another cigar, and looked on with a gentlemanlike indolence of manner while his steward dealt out the little heaps of coin, in sums ranging from fifty to three hundred pounds. The obsequious tradespeople received their money with profound satisfaction, and one by one bowed themselves out of the room, expressing their respectful regret at Mr. de Fontenoy's departure.

Mr. Migson was the last to be paid. He sighed as he counted the sovereigns into a little canvas bag, reflecting that these were the last he was to receive from one who might have been a permanent tenant, but for his own unlucky precipitation.

"My steward will leave the key at your office, Mr. Migson," Mr. de Fontenoy said haughtily, in response to the auctioneer's humble apologies; "I have nothing more to say."

Waiting for him at the gates of his domain Mr. Migson found his friends and fellow-tradesmen, and these gentlemen were not sparing in their reproaches.

"A nice thing you've done for yourself and us, Migson," said Mr. Till the butcher, a leading personage in St. Dunstans, "with your blundering suspicion. It's a pity you don't know a gentleman when you see him."

"It was that paragraph in the *Times*," murmured Mr. Migson disconsolately; "and I never did hear of a peerage passing over a son to go to a brother."

"Didn't Mr. de Fontenoy tell you it was given for political services? Of course that makes all the difference. However, you've lost a good tenant, and we've all lost a first-rate customer, and there's no use in saying any more about it. You'll know how to hold your tongue another time, I daresay, Migson; but the worst of a suspicious man is, that he's always suspicious in the wrong place. When you do get a swindler in your house, you're pretty sure to be taken in by him."

The auctioneer submitted meekly enough to these upbraidings. At home he had still more bitter words to hear from the lips of his better half, who had made Mrs. de Fontenoy's bonnets her study at the parish church, and who had a profound belief in that lady's grandeur. Mr. Migson locked the canvas bag of gold in his iron safe with the guilty air of a man who is putting away the proceeds of a murder. Had he not, with ruthless hand, slain his own good fortune?

The De Fontenoys departed from the station at two o'clock with much pomp and ceremony, attended by the three gray footmen and the careful Richards. Again the porters had occasion to remark the extreme heaviness of the great deal cases, and opined that those ponderous chests contained the De Fontenoy plate. With the two o'clock train every vestige of the De Fontenoys disappeared; and before three Mr. Migson made his dismal entry into Boisgilbert Hall, accompanied by a deaf old charwoman who was in the habit of taking care of the house for him when it was empty. He went through the rooms disconsolately, groaning over their dreary emptiness. Everything was in very decent order. The De Fontenoys had done little damage. Every room in the house smelt of stale cigars; but

open windows and a general cleaning would of course banish this tobacco-tainted atmosphere. On the whole, Mr. Migson found no reason to complain of his lost tenants.

He absented himself from his club at the Prince of Wales's Feathers that evening, not caring to face his injured fellow-townsmen, and he spent the hours drearily enough by the domestic hearth, listening dolefully to Mrs. Migson's prophecies that Boisgilbert Hall would remain unlet until the following July or August.

He was sitting in his office the next morning, writing the catalogue of an approaching sale, when a little man, with a sharp eager face, came in at the half-glass door.

"Mr. Migson, I presume," he said.

"Yes, sir, my name is Migson," replied the auctioneer, jumping off his stool and handing the stranger a chair.

"My name is Peacock, and I am a detective officer attached to Scotland-yard," said the stranger, in a sharp concise manner that corresponded exactly with the sharpness of his countenance. "You wrote a letter to a private-inquiry office, asking for information about a party by the name of De Fontenoy."

"I did write such a letter," Mr. Migson admitted; "but I have since had reason to believe Mr. de Fontenoy a perfectly solvent person; that I was laboring under an unfortunate mistake, in short."

"What does that mean? He has paid you, I suppose?"

"Yes, he has paid the full amount due to me."

"And he paid you in gold, I suppose, didn't he?"

"How did you know that?" asked the startled auctioneer.

"Because, if he's the man I think he is, he's rather liberal with his gold at times. However, the best thing I can do is to go and take a look at him, if you'll show me the way to your place."

"The De Fontenoys left St. Dunstans yesterday at two o'clock," replied Mr. Migson.

"The devil they did! Then I believe as good a chance as ever I had of landing a big fish has slipped through my fingers.

I only got a hint from the man you wrote to last night. There was no one he knew of in the swindling line answering to your description, but he thought the case might be something in my way. Was this De Fontenoy a tall dark man, with a small scar over the right eyebrow, and a very prominent chin?"

"Yes, that's the man."

"I thought as much. You haven't disposed of the money he paid you?"

"No."

"Let's have a look at it."

Mr. Migson opened his iron safe, with a sinking sensation very much like sea-sickness. He handed the little canvas bag to the detective, who untied the string and threw a heap of glittering sovereigns out upon the auctioneer's desk with a contemptuous gesture.

"Hark at 'em!" he cried; "did you ever hear gold rattle like that? Look at the milling," he added, feeling the edge of a sovereign with his thumb. "Very well done; but nothing like the genuine article."

"Do you mean to say the money's bad?" faltered Mr. Migson.

"Every fraction of it. The sovereigns are worth about a shilling a-piece in the trade, and Mr. de Fontenoy is a man best known as Slippery Joseph, one of the most daring coiners that ever lived. There's been no end of bad sovereigns in circulation for the last six months, and we've been sorely put to it to tell where they came from. There's not a den in London that hasn't been searched, while our gentleman and his pals have been doing their work on the quiet down here. And now let's go and have a look at your place."

Mr. Migson accompanied the detective to Boisgilbert Hall; and in the cellarage of that mansion they found ample evidence of the nefarious trade that had been carried on by Slippery Joseph and his gang, who had lived on the fat of the land at St. Dunstans-by-the-Sea while their accomplices were circulating the base coin in London and other large cities. Mr.

Peacock hastened back to town directly after his inspection, leaving Mr. Migson to lament his loss, and to communicate the miserable news to his fellow-sufferers. A doleful unanimity prevailed that night at the Prince of Wales's Feathers; and it was long before the shopkeepers of St. Dunstans recovered from the severe shock. About two months after his departure they had the hollow satisfaction of reading the account of Mr. de Fontenoy's arrest. He had taken a large house at Bayswater, and stood high in the opinion of his tradespeople at the time of his capture. He was sentenced to penal servitude, in which his accomplices, the three gray footmen and the plausible Mr. Richards, participated. Mrs. de Fontenoy, who had been a lady's-maid in the household of Lord Malplaquet, and whose knowledge of the affairs of that family, and friendly acquaintance with her old fellow-servants at the house in Grosvenor-square, had been of considerable use to her husband, was not implicated in the felonious dealings of the gang, and was left to mourn the loss of her brilliant position as the daughter and heiress of a Russian prince.

A GOOD HATER.

IR," said Dr. Johnson, "I like a good hater!" Philip Rayner used to boast that in this respect he was a man after the great lexicographer's heart. "I never forgive an injury," he said, "and I never forget a kindness." True, there are certain gracious sentences recorded in the teaching of our Saviour, and treasured in the writings of St. Paul, which do not quite harmonise with Samuel Johnson's dictum; sentences which inculcate an inexhaustible capacity for the pardon of wrongs; precepts which show us how poor a thing it is only to love them who love us. Perhaps Philip Rayner would have been very angry in those early days if any one had disputed his claim to the title of Christian. He went to church once every Sunday; twice sometimes when the day of rest seemed especially long, and he had nothing better to do with his afternoon leisure; and if he did not listen very attentively to the voice of the preacher, or join with any great fervor in the ritual, he at least offered a good example to the multitude by his well-brushed clothes, spotless linen, and decorous behavior. He paid his debts to the uttermost farthing, and was not altogether wanting in benevolence, contributing to certain old-established respectable charities in a fair proportion to his income.

The world in which he lived spoke well of Philip Rayner

He was a clever prosperous young man, with a character unsullied by vice, an agreeable personal appearance, and a manner that was very quiet, but not wanting in pleasantness. A thoughtful young man too, who was apt to contemplate all things in their gravest aspect. For the rest he was very happily placed in the world, being the only son of a wealthy leather merchant, who had carried on a prosperous trade for the last forty years in some gloomy old premises in the river-side district beyond the Tower.

His father had educated this only son upon a rough-and-ready principle of his own. No Eton or Harrow, no expensive University education, no riotous career amongst the patrician youth of Oxford or Cambridge, to spoil the lad for commercial pursuits, and a quiet humdrum middle-class life. Old Samuel Rayner sent his boy to a respectable mercantile academy, the principal whereof was instructed to give his pupil a sound mercantile education; no perpetual grinding at the adventures of pious Æneas, no useless grubbing amongst Greek roots, but plenty of book-keeping by double entry, a profound study of tare and tret, and a familiar acquaintance with fractions. This was the kind of teaching Mr. Rayner demanded for his son, and the boy had it. His education seemed to him rather a dull business altogether; but he went through it patiently enough, and finally emerged from the mercantile academy a first-rate arithmetician, a very fair French and German scholar, and a marvel of excellence in the way of penmanship.

Philip Rayner's home life, for the first five years after he left school, was not particularly cheerful. The old man elected to live, where his forefathers had lived before him, in a big gloomy mansion adjoining the business premises of Rayner, Rayner, and Sons. The brass-plate on the counting-house door which bore this inscription had been old and worn when Samuel Rayner was a little boy, and the Rayner, Rayner, referred to thereby were two dryasdust brothers, who had worn snuff-colored small clothes, and snuff-colored coats with bright brass buttons, and brown George wigs on their elderly heads, in the days of

the great rebellion. They had traded in hides when Lovat lay in the tower close at hand, these departed gentlemen, and now slept side by side in a queer little old churchyard beneath the shadow of the great fortress, a burial-place that has long been shut up. Philip Rayner used to stand at the rusty iron gate, and stare listlessly in at the nettle-grown graves, sometimes of a sultry summer evening, when he took his solitary walks abroad, and was sorely perplexed how to dispose of his leisure in that remote region.

It was a dismal home for youth certainly, that great gaunt red-brick mansion, with its wide ghastly oaken staircase, where in the twilight it would seem more natural to meet some phantasmal lady in a brocaded sacque, or some withered gentleman in powder and velvet, with silk stockings rolled over his knees, than to encounter any modern flesh-and-blood creature. Such deep-toned oaken wainscots; such marvels of wood-carving over obscure doors and in forgotten passages; such vast and darksome closets in every direction; such a delicious house altogether for a connoisseur in old houses, but O, such a gruesome place to live in!

Happily, Philip Rayner was not troubled with an imaginative temperament; he accepted his life very quietly, only thinking that it was rather a dull world upon the whole, and that perhaps his happiest days had been those of his academical existence, with their riotous gambollings in the great playground at Peckham, and their stolen feastings in the dormitories. He thought it rather a hard thing that his father had not a fine country house, with gardens and hot houses, stabling and billiard-room, like other men in his position; but whenever he ventured to argue the point with the old gentleman, he ended by agreeing with his parent that it was a foolish thing for a man to waste all his substance on splendor and show, and be obliged to face the bankruptcy-court in his old age.

"When I die, you will be one of the richest men in the leather trade, Phil," the old man usually wound up by saying; "and you wouldn't have been that if I'd sent you to the University,

and squandered my income on country houses, and carriages, and horses."

So Philip, not having any extravagant propensities, came to consider things from his father's point of view, and to think that it was, after all, a good thing that they had no splendid suburban mansion at Dulwich or Clapham, Sydenham or Richmond, to absorb the profits of their trade. He came very soon—too soon, considering how young a man he was in these days—to have the same keen interest in savings and investments, for their own sake, that his father had; to thrust his hands deep down in his pockets with a sense of satisfaction when he remembered how little he and his father spent in their quiet life, and how much there was out at interest, and growing more day by day. He read the money article in the *Times* every morning directly after his father, and the two discussed the state of things on Change with never-failing interest.

He grew in time, too, to have a warm liking for that gloomy old house; grew to have prim bachelor ways in advance of his years, and to think it mattered very little where a man lived so long as he was comfortably lodged and well catered for. It was not a mean or sordid household by any means. There was a gray-headed old butler, who had been custodian of the cellars and the massive old plate for the last thirty years, and who would have laid his head on the block in the adjacent Tower rather than compromise the family dignity by any neglect of his duties; there was a housekeeper of fabulous antiquity, who remembered the last hours of the last snuff-colored gentleman; and there were a couple of prim sour-visaged maid-servants of a discreet age, selected by the housekeeper, who, change as they might as to their individuality, never underwent any variation as to those two qualities of primness and sourness."

There was no other woman in the little household. Philip's mother had died years ago, when he was quite a small boy in brown-holland pinafores, and with what seemed to his young mind a perpetual whooping-cough. She was dead. There was a portrait of her in an obscure room opening out of Philip's

bed-chamber, a picture which had been banished there in the early days after her death, when the bereaved husband could not endure to be reminded of his affliction, and which had never been restored to its place of honor. Philip used to look at this portrait sometimes, wondering what difference it would have made in his life had his mother lived. He felt that there would have been a great difference somehow, but could not divine the nature of it. The face in the picture was a pretty face enough, fair, and girlish, and gentle; but to the son it seemed of an angelic beauty. Perhaps this feeling for the mother whose living presence he could scarcely remember, was the one touch of romance in Philip Rayner's character.

He was thirty years of age, and had been his father's co-adjutor and representative in the business for the last ten years of his life. The father was growing quite an old man now; was subject to severe attacks of gout, which kept him a prisoner to his armchair, much to his aggravation, and Philip was almost sole manager of the business. He consulted his father day by day, it is true, but the consultation was a kind of formula, for Samuel Rayner's brain was beginning to lose its business faculty.

In all these years, since he had left school upon his seventeenth birthday to enter into the proud possession of a stool in his father's counting-house, Philip Rayner had made only one friend. This was a young man who came into the office a little later as corresponding clerk, more especially for the foreign correspondence, which was heavy in the house of Rayner, Rayner and Sons. The lad was two years younger than Philip, and was little more than a lad fresh from a German university, when he began his commercial career. His name was George Tolson, and he was the son of a major in a crack regiment, who had made ducks and drakes of a very handsome fortune, and had cut his throat one morning in a fit of delirium-tremens, leaving a widow and two helpless orphans to face a life which he had done his best to render hard for them.

Some benevolent friends had come forward to help the for-

lorn woman, and the boy had been sent to Germany, and the girl to a semi-charitable school for the rearing of officers' daughters; so they had struggled on somehow, until the boy was able to win a livelihood by his industry, and the girl old enough to go out as governess. The mother had a lodging somewhere in an obscure street on the Surrey side of the Thames, and here George used to return every evening when his office duties were over.

The friendship between these two young men did not arise all in a moment. Philip Rayner was by no means impulsive, and George Tolson, though free and frank as the winds of heaven, was too proud to make the faintest advance towards the son of his employer. For some time these two behaved towards each other with a supreme reserve; but they were the only young men in the office, and little by little the ice melted until acquaintance ripened into friendship. They had few tastes in common. George Tolson was much more versatile, of a brighter and more joyous nature, than his master's son; but they were both young, and that made a bond between them. Nor was this the only link. There were circumstances in George Tolson's life which awakened a keen interest in the mind of Philip. He had discovered that George was the chief support and devoted companion of his mother, and he envied him so tender a tie, so precious a duty. He used to walk home with George on summer evenings, now and then, and growing bolder and more familiar by slow degrees, would consent by and by to drop in upon the widow, and take a late cup of tea after his walk, or play a game of chess with George while the mother looked on. If he had possessed the power to help his friend in any substantial manner, he would have done it; but he was still in a state of tutelage, and Samuel Rayner thought he did quite enough in giving the young man a liberal salary. All that Philip could do was to testify his regard for the widow by such small gifts as he could afford for the embellishment of her scantily furnished lodging—a plated tea service—a new chess-board and men—a pair of china vases for the mantel-piece, and

so on. They were trifling gifts, but very precious to Mrs. Tolson, who had not been favored by such tributes of late years.

And so the years went on, with a quiet monotony which was pleasant enough to Philip, who had no yearning for change. He and George used to walk together a great deal in those long summer evenings, late into the autumn even, when lamps were flaming in the misty streets, or in the cold spring nights, when a great wind blustered in every open space and at every street corner. There was not a nook in the old City they left unexplored in these evening rambles, only now and then pushing their way beyond that labyrinth of brick and mortar to some healthy hillside out north, or rural-looking common in the south. They were very happy together, George full of wild reckless talk about lives that were different from theirs; lives of adventure in distant lands, lives in camp and on board ship, tossed about by the winds and waves, and in frequent contest with savage foes; the kind of life he longed to lead, in short, instead of that dryasdust life of the counting-house, which might go on for ever, and leave him no better man than he was now.

"You get an increase of salary every year, you know, George!" suggested the practical Philip. "It's not such a bad thing, after all. And if you stick to business, by and by, when we are both middle-aged men, I may be able to give you a junior partnership."

"Yes, I know you're very good, old fellow, and the governor is very good, and I'm altogether better off than I deserve. But you see I don't think I was intended for that sort of life. There's too much of my father's blood in me. The Tolsons have been soldiers time out of mind. If it hadn't been for my mother, I should have enlisted ever so long ago."

He looked very handsome as he said this, with his hat off, and his waving auburn hair blown off his forehead by the light summer wind. The two young men were sitting on an old bulkhead in a deserted wharf above the swift-flowing river, a

pleasant solitary spot enough in the heart of the great city, and a favorite resting place with them after a long ramble.

Yes, he was very handsome, in a noble picturesque style. One could fancy that the blood of fighting Cavaliers, rebellious Jacobite gentlemen of the old time, ran in his veins. There was an ardor and fulness of life about him not common to modern commercial youth. The bright blue eyes used to light up with a sudden fire when he was vehement, the flexible lips had a hundred mutations of expression. He was a striking contrast to his friend in this, whose dark good-looking face underwent few changes. A solid square forehead, deep-set grave gray eyes, a firm mouth, and a clear dark skin were the distinguishing marks of Philip Rayner's physiognomy.

A change came in Philip's life soon after this—a change which seemed to make a new man of him, from which he afterwards dated the beginning of another existence. It was as if a door had opened and shut upon all the life that had gone before, and he had passed out of that close narrow atmosphere into a new world; a world of light, and air, and sunshine, that was brighter and fairer than anything he had ever known or dreamt of before. In plain words, Philip Rayner fell in love.

It happened one morning that the old dealer in hides took less interest than usual in the money article, laid aside his particular portion of the *Times* with a long-drawn sigh, and sat gazing meditatively at the fire in so fixed an attitude, and with such a rapt countenance, that Philip laid down his paper too, and looked at his progenitor wonderingly.

"Is there anything amiss, father?" he asked.

"No, no, Phil, no; nothing amiss, nothing amiss. The fact is, I've had a letter."

"Some very particular letter, I suppose?" the younger man hazarded anxiously.

"Yes, a particular letter, Phil, in a hand I never thought to see again in this world; a letter from the dead."

"What do you mean, father?"

"When I married your mother, Philip, it wasn't exactly to

be called a love-match, though I was fond of her then, and grew to be fonder of her afterwards, poor soul. But I had been in love before, and she knew it. I was in love with a first cousin of mine, an orphan girl, that my father and mother had brought up on charity. You'd laugh at me, I daresay, if I were to tell you how I loved that girl; for such things sound foolish when a man is old and feeble, with one foot in the grave. But I loved Catherine Marsh with all my heart and soul. The old people were dead against our marrying at first, seeing that Catherine was no better than a pauper, as they said; but they were fond of her in spite of their talk, and finding that my heart was set upon the business, my father gave way, and of course my mother didn't hold out after him. It was all settled. I fancied myself the happiest man in Christendom. Well, Phil, it's an old story, and common enough. She jilted me. She never had loved me, I suppose. However that was, she ran away with an Italian fellow called Paroldi, Joseph Paroldi, who taught my sister Rosa singing; an idle scapegrace, with nothing in his favor but a handsome face, and a specious taking manner. She ran away with him one morning, leaving a penitent little note for me, to say that she had turned Catholic some time before, and that they had been married at the Roman-catholic church in Moorfields."

"What a heartless hussey!" cried the son. "You never could forgive such treachery as that, father."

"Well, Phil, it was a hard thing for a man to forgive, wasn't it? I was furious against her at first, and felt as if I could have killed her if she had come across my path in those days. But little by little I got to think of her differently, remembering what a young thing she was, only just turned eighteen, when she married that scoundrel, and recalling looks and words of hers that had hinted at some secret trouble weighing upon her mind, until I began to believe that she had struggled hard to be true to me, and had often wanted to tell me all. So, you see, it ended by my forgiving her."

Philip Rayner shrugged his shoulders with an involuntary expression of contempt for his father's weakness.

"I could never have brought myself to do that," he said.

"Ah, you think not, Phil," answered the old man, "you think not; but when a man has once loved a woman, her face is always rising up before him, pleading to him to think tenderly of her, let her have treated him as badly as she may. It always ends with his forgiving her. The memory of the days when he thought she loved him is too much for his manhood. It always ends so."

"It would never end so with me," muttered the young man, clenching his fist vindictively. "Nothing upon this earth could induce me to forgive a woman who had jilted me. But how about the letter you talk of, father, and what has that to do with this old story?"

"It is from her, Philip, from Catherine Marsh—Catherine Paroldi; the last letter she ever wrote. She is dead. Another hand tells me that at the end of the letter; her daughter's. She is dead, and has left one child, a girl, the last of a large family, all dead but this one. Paroldi took her out to the West Indies, it seems, where they did well enough for many years, but had much sorrow, the climate killing their children one after another; the last of the flock lived; that was all. Then came reverses; the man's health failed him, and ten years ago he died. After that the poor soul kept herself and her child by teaching. She was always a sweet musician, with a voice as clear and fresh as the skylark's, and I think it was that fellow's music tempted her away from me. And so she got on somehow, she says in her letter, till she felt death close at hand; and then, not having one wealthy friend in the world whose bounty she could entreat for her child, except myself, and knowing that I was a good man, she says, poor soul, she turns to me, beseeching me for Christian charity, if not for the memory of those days when I loved her—when did I not love you, my sweet cruel Catherine?—to befriend her orphan daughter. She does not ask me to do much for the girl; not to adopt her, or maintain her in a life of idleness; only to put her into some way of making an honest living, and to keep her from falling

into dangerous hands. The letter came by hand this morning. The girl is in London. What am I to do, Phil? You are the master now, as I take it. Whatever I save is saved for you; whatever I spend is so much out of your pocket. What shall we do with Catherine Paroldi? She has been christened after her mother, Catherine."

"It is hard for a woman to get her living now-a-days," Philip answered thoughtfully; "a young woman too, and a foreigner, as you may say. A girl's keep costs next to nothing. She might live here, surely, father. Mrs. Dorking would take good care of her."

"Yes, that would be well enough for the girl, for the time. But by and by; she must get her living by and by, Phil."

"She would be better used to English ways, after a year or two. And you would leave her a trifle, I daresay, father."

"I don't know about that; it's generous of you to think of it, Phil."

Philip Rayner was not ungenerous. He liked the idea that the profits of the business were yearly increasing, and that there was money being sunk from time to time, of which he must needs be master by and by. But he was not a miser, and he did not care about spending money. His narrow life had crippled his imagination in that respect. He had no yearning for the follies or pleasures upon which the spendthrift wastes the hard-earned thousands of his forefathers.

Catherine Paroldi came to the old house near the Tower. A tall slim slip of a girl, with a very dark complexion, browned by West-Indian suns; not lovely to look upon, by any means, Philip thought at first, but with eyes of wondrous power and beauty, as he came to understand before long, and with a tender, half-pleading, half-bewitching manner, not long to be resisted by the heart of man.

She was not very gay at first, this friendless orphaned girl of seventeen years old, for the shadow of a great sorrow was still upon her; yet she brightened the old house by her presence

in a greater degree than Philip Rayner could have imagined possible. It was a new thing to come home and see her sitting in the grim wainscoted parlor; it made his coming home something different from what it had been. He used to be startled by finding himself thinking of this dark-eyed Catherine sometimes in business hours when he had a file of accounts or a ponderous ledger before him. The day seemed longer to him than of old, and he wondered at his eagerness to go home to the quiet dinner and long quiet evening, when Catherine sat at a little table near the old man, busy with some complicated piece of embroidery, for which, with all other delicate kinds of fancy work, she had an especial genius.

There would be no difficulty about her getting her own living by and by, Samuel Rayner said, seeing how industrious the girl was. Philip thought that she might never have any occasion to earn a living for herself. It would have seemed a hard thing for one so tender and gentle to be turned adrift upon a cold, cruel world. And what could they do without her in that dreary old house, having once known the magical brightening influence of her presence? She had a hundred little arts by which a woman can embellish the dullest home, and little by little, as she found herself privileged to do these things, exercised her pretty trivial arts. Quaint old china jars and bottles, and cups and tea-pots, that had been hidden away in remote cupboards, blackened with the dust of ages, came out of their hiding-places, and were placed about here and there, making patches of light and color in the darksome rooms. The ponderous old furniture was polished into a kind of beauty, and by a new disposition of old material she brought light and air into gloomy corners. Flowers bloomed here and there in the windows, and a pair of pet birds of gay plumage, which she had brought with her from Trinidad, enlivened the family parlor. There was a new atmosphere in the house, somehow, and Philip felt the change keenly.

Perhaps at this time Mr. Rayner the younger did not care quite so much for the society of his chosen friend George Tolson

It was mid-winter, and there was considerable excuse for the suspension of their evening rambles; but Philip felt that he was not treating his friend quite fairly, and in order to make some amends, invited him home to dinner once or twice a week. The old man had no objection to his company; the son was quite master now.

It may be that Philip wanted to hear Catherine Paroldi's praises from the lips of the friend whose judgment he believed in. He was certainly gratified when George spoke of the beauty of her dark eyes, and the charm of her singing. She had found the key of the old-fashioned square piano in a corner of the parlor, the piano at which her father had taught Miss Rayner singing; and she sang and played to her benefactor and his son sometimes of an evening. Her voice was a clear, thrilling soprano, her touch upon the keys full of tenderness and feeling. She sang all the old English ballads which Samuel Rayner loved, besides Italian music of the best kind which her father had taught her while she was quite a child.

Philip was no musician. He had only a vague consciousness of melody in Catherine's singing. It was a pleasant soothing influence for him; a little melancholy, perhaps, awakening a dim sense of sadness in his breast—that was all. He would scarcely have distinguished one of her songs from another without the words. He felt this deficiency of his rather keenly when George Tolson was with them, for George had a fine baritone voice and considerable taste for music, and would sing a duet with Catherine very often. It seemed to bring those two closer together, and for the first time Philip felt a pang of jealousy. He was angry with himself for the feeling, and made a great effort to overcome it, asking his friend to the old house all the oftener because of this secret weakness.

"What fear need I have of him, if she loves me?" he argued with himself; "and if not, what can it matter whom she sees? But I think she loves me; yes, I believe she loves me."

He thought she loved him. He had some justification for so thinking, undoubtedly. The girl was of a confiding, affec-

tionate disposition, and was deeply grateful to these friends who had given her a home. Perhaps in her eagerness to prove her gratitude, in all the trivial ways that lay in her power, she may have been dangerously kind to her cousin, watching for every little opportunity of giving him pleasure, deferring to his wishes with a sweet childlike submission, going out to meet him with bright welcoming looks when he came home, making his life altogether bewilderingly happy, to the peril of his peace.

She was quite different to George Tolson. Philip saw the difference, and the fact of it added much to his happiness. To George her manner was reserved, singularly cold and distant, Philip thought; she took no pains to please him, and never betrayed any pleasure in his presence. No, there was no fear of George.

So the days and weeks drifted on, with a gentle monotony that would have been irksome to restless spirits; but Philip's life was a new life, and he wondered how he could ever have existed in a world unbrightened by Catherine Paroldi. Little by little, she who had been unlovely at first grew to be most beautiful in his sight. The tawny hue of her skin faded in the cool English atmosphere, leaving her pale and fair, like a white lily. Her smile grew radiant as her spirits improved, and lighted up the pale face with a kind of glory, like the light in an old altar-piece where it all comes from one divine face; a mere trick of art, perhaps, but with a lovely meaning in it.

Philip was in no hurry to urge his suit. His was a reserved nature, with much latent pride beneath a quiet manner. He watched her closely, and fancied himself secure of her love. He had only to speak when the fitting time came; she must know how much he loved her. In the meanwhile, all his dreams were of a future in which she was to be his wife. He could not think of himself for a moment apart from her. The possibility that this desire of his heart might be denied him never entered into his mind.

And so the time went on in the old house near the Tower

with a profound peacefulness, George Tolson coming very often in the lengthening spring evenings, almost their only visitor. The three young people used to walk together of an evening in the empty city streets sometimes, as the weather grew milder, Catherine arm-in-arm with her cousin, George Tolson walking by her side, expounding curious scraps of archæological lore about the churches and quaint old buildings of divers kinds hidden in the narrow streets and lanes by which they went.

So the time went on, until there came a sudden break in this monotonous life for Philip Rayner. His father insisted upon his going on a round among their customers in the north of England. There were details in the management of the trade that wanted revision and rearrangement. There had been numerous complaints of late from provincial customers; prices must be lowered to meet the march of the times. It was altogether a delicate business, requiring the exercise of commercial diplomacy, and necessitating, Samuel Rayner said, the presence of a principal.

He was surprised to find his son disinclined for the performance of this duty; anxious to delegate it to a clerk; in fact, anything rather than to go himself. But upon this point the old man was absolute. Roused by a threatened danger to his house, he showed himself as keen a man of business as in his best days. Rayner, Rayner, and Sons must show themselves prompt to satisfy the demands of the times. His son Philip must go, and none other. So Philip went. It was only a business of a month or six weeks, yet he felt as if the very mainspring of his life was broken when he turned his back upon the familiar old house.

He never forgot that parting. He was to go by the night mail, and it was a calm, airless evening early in May when he left his father's house. Catherine came to the hall-door to bid him good-bye. For the first time in his life he kissed her. Just at the last, when his portmanteau had been put on the roof of the cab, and the old butler was standing on the door-step talking to the driver, Philip took his cousin in his arms, and kissed

her on the lips. It was one long, passionate kiss, and he fancied that it was at once the declaration and the seal of his love. She could not misunderstand him after that; she was his own from that moment.

Catherine Paroldi gave a little cry of astonishment or reproof, and ran back to the parlor. There was not a moment to lose. Philip sprang into the cab, and drove off. He saw her for an instant at the open window watching him, with the evening sun upon her face. That picture—the pale young face, the shadowy eyes, and loose brown hair, framed in the window—haunted him all through the long night journey. The memory of that one unpremeditated kiss haunted him too, the seal which he had set upon his love.

The six weeks were dragged out into two months. People in the north were slow, and Philip Rayner had a great many places to visit. Having once undertaken the business, he was determined to do it thoroughly, and he found matters regulated themselves easily and pleasantly enough, by the exercise of his personal influence and a little judicious liberality. Altogether his mission was a successful one.

It was the end of June when he turned his face homewards; brilliant weather, and the country through which he went looking its fairest. But Philip Rayner did not think much of the verdant summer world through which he was travelling. His thoughts sped on before him to the end of the journey. How would she receive him, Catherine, his idol? With blushes and shy downcast looks? No, he scarcely thought that. There had been no blush upon the face that looked out at him from the open window. How would she receive him, his darling, his own? Doubly his own from the moment in which he had pressed that passionate kiss upon her unresisting lips.

His only letters from home had been from her; dear little letters, telling him all the trivial news of the old house, his father's talk of him, the blank caused by his absence; sweet womanly letters, which a sister might have written to a brother.

He never thought of that. To him they were the letters of his plighted wife.

For the last few days he had heard nothing. His movements just at the end had been uncertain. But he had no fear of evil, or that he should find any change in his dull peaceful home.

It was beginning to grow dusk when the cab drew up at the familiar door, with its carved wooden canopy of the William and Mary period, supported by two chubby-faced cherubs. Looking eagerly up at the old house, a great shock fell upon him. The blinds were all drawn closely down in the still summer evening. His first thought was of his father—his first thought was of the truth. The old man was dead.

The ancient butler opened the door, and received his new master with a solemn face—a face in which there was real grief, for the man had loved his employer of so many years.

"There never was a better master or a better man," he said, with something like a sob. "Yes, Mr. Philip, we've lost him. He fell down in a fit just after breakfast, though he'd read his newspaper and everything just the same as usual, and he never spoke again, poor, dear gentleman. There was as many as four doctors with him at one time, for Miss Paroldi wouldn't believe as there was no hope; but they could do nothing for him. There was a telegram sent to you at Sheffield the night before last. You got it, didn't you, sir?"

"No; I left Sheffield last week. I came here straight from Hull. Let me go to his room, Jackson; I should like to see him at once."

"He looks as calm as a sleeping baby, God bless him! I'm very glad you've come home, sir. There's many things about the funeral we couldn't settle without you. I told the undertaker I knew you'd have everything of the handsomest, but of course I could say no more than that."

Philip went up-stairs to the solemn death-chamber, a long oak-panelled room, with four tall narrow windows, which had been gloomy enough even when inhabited by the living. He

had scarcely known until this moment how much he loved his father, or how bitter a blow their parting was to be. For the time, even the image of Catherine Paroldi was blotted from his mind. He stopped in that darkened room for a long while, nearly an hour, and then went slowly down-stairs in the deepening summer dusk. Day was not quite ended even yet, though the early stars were shining faintly through the long staircase window as he went down.

There was a lamp burning dimly in the hall. Catherine came out of the parlor, very pale, and dressed in black; it was one of the black dresses she had worn in memory of her mother. She gave him her hand, looking at him with a grave pitying face.

"I am so sorry for you, cousin Philip," she said; "so sorry for my own sake, too. I loved him very dearly. Indeed, I had good reason to love him," she added, breaking down with a little choking sound.

They went into the parlor, and sat there in mournful silence till very late, only saying a few words now and then. On the next day Catherine told Philip all about his father's last moments, about that last breakfast, too, when he had been quite nimself, and had talked as cheerfully as ever he had done within her knowledge of him, speaking of his son's approaching return, and looking forward with evident pleasure to that event.

Two days afterward came the funeral, a stately ceremonial; for Philip Rayner chose this conventional mode of testifying to his respect for the dead man, as the only manner in which he could exhibit such a feeling to the eyes of the commonplace world in which his father had lived. The city churchyard wherein the Brothers Rayner lay buried had long been closed, so the old man's bones were carried to Norwood Cemetery, by and by to rest under a handsome monument.

It was with profound sadness in his heart that Philip rode homeward through the summer sunlight, and amidst the busy life of suburb and city, when all was over, and the dreary day's work done. No, all was not quite over. There was the will to

be read, a ceremony which did not involve much anxiety or heart-burning; for Samuel Rayner had not many relatives, and those he left behind him were, with the exception of Catherine Paroldi, wealthy traders settled in remote colonies. There was no one but Philip and the two old servants, Mrs. Dorking the housekeeper and Jackson the butler, to hear the reading of the will, which was read with all due solemnity by the family solicitor, in the grim darksome dining-room, a spacious chamber only used on state occasions.

The will was an old one, dated six years ago, and worded in a very simple manner. The old man left an annuity to each of his faithful servants, a mourning ring or so to the distant traders, a small legacy to the doctor who had attended him for some thirty years of his life, and all the rest to his only son. There was nothing for Catherine Paroldi. The will had been executed before Samuel Rayner knew of the girl's existence, and there was no codicil.

It mattered very little, Philip thought. All that he had would be Catherine's. It was time for him now to speak plainly; the dear girl must not have an hour's doubt as to the security of her position. He would speak to her that very evening. There was no indecency, no lack of reverence for the dead, in such promptitude. Philip fancied that his marriage with Catherine would have been the desire of his father's heart. The old man must have surely foreseen their union, or he would never have left Catherine Marsh's daughter penniless.

The cousins sat alone together that evening, after a dinner of which neither had eaten anything. It was a warm, sunny mid-summer evening, and the faint hum of the declining city life came to them through the open windows with a distant drowsy sound. The old house had that aspect of profound dulness peculiar to a habitation in the heart of a city on a summer evening, when mankind has a natural yearning for the sweet freedom of the hill-side, and for the green leaves in the wood-land. Philip had no such yearning to-night, however. To him the shadowy oak-panelled room was paradise. He forgot that

he had seen his kind old father laid in the grave that day, he could think of nothing but Catherine's pensive face as she sat by the open window, with the low western sunlight shining upon her, as it had shone on the evening when he kissed her. The words which he had to speak did not come to him very easily; he loved her too much to be over-bold. But in that last happy hour of his youth there was no shadow of doubt in his mind. He had never contemplated the possibility of a refusal on Catherine's part; he had never told himself that he might have a rival; he had never doubted that she loved him. In perfect faith he had accepted her grateful affection, her frank sisterly regard, as an earnest of the love that was to be given when he pleaded for it. He was rather ashamed of himself for having been so backward in pleading, that was all.

"Catherine," he said at last, drawing his chair nearer hers, "I have something to say to you."

She had been working busily until this moment, but she laid aside her work as he spoke, and turned her calm pensive face towards him.

"And I want to speak to you, cousin," she answered, blushing a bright rosy red all of a sudden. "There is something I have been wanting to say for the last three days, but I hadn't the courage. And yet I know how good you are, and that nothing in the world could make you unkind to me."

"Surely not, my dear. Unkind to *you*, Catherine! How could I ever be that?"

"Of course not; and that is why it has been so foolish in me to feel afraid of speaking frankly. I think you must know how happy and peaceful my life has been in this dear old house, cousin Philip, and how grateful I must ever be to you and your dear father for all your goodness to me,—but—but—we are both young, and it would not do for us to go on living here together. People would think it strange. Mrs. Dorking told me as much a day or two ago—and the evening after cousin Samuel's death I had the offer of a new home. Don't think me ungrateful, pray, Cousin Philip, or that I want to run away from you.

Indeed, I cannot fancy a sister loving her only brother better than I love you; but I must go away—every one says that."

She looked at him just a little anxiously, the blush fading slowly away from the sweet face.

"A new home! Why should you go away, Catherine? What need you care if some malicious fool should slander us? It is hardly possible for malice to go so far as that; and it can matter so little to us, for——" And then without finishing the sentence, he exclaimed, "The offer of a new home, Catherine! What home?"

"Mrs. Tolson—George's mother—has asked me to stay with her till—till I am married."

She was blushing again by this time, and the heavy lids dropped over the glorious dark eyes.

"Till you are married!"

"Yes, cousin Philip. I ought to have told you sooner, perhaps, but it happened while you were away, and it seemed such a stupid thing to write about, somehow. George Tolson has asked me to be his wife, and—and—I love him very dearly—and we are to be married in a month or two. We shall not be rich, of course, for George has his mother to keep—that is his first duty—but we can live happily on a very little, we love each other so truly."

The ghastly change in her cousin's face stopped her suddenly in the midst of her innocent confession.

"Cousin, dear cousin Philip," she exclaimed, "you are not angry?"

"Angry!" cried the young man; "you have broken my heart. What, didn't you know that I loved you? Didn't you know that every hope I had was built upon the security of your love? When I kissed you that night I went away, if you had doubted before, could you doubt then what I felt for you?"

"Indeed, Philip, I thought it was only a cousin's kiss. We have been like brother and sister; I never dreamt you cared for me more than you might have cared for a sister."

"Of course not!" Philip Rayner cried, with a bitter laugh.

"What is easier than to say that? And he, the scoundrel, the traitor, the false friend I brought to this house, the sneaking villain who came into our firm a beggar—he to go behind my back and steal you!"

"Stop, Philip! I cannot hear you say those things of him. What right had he to suppose that you cared for me? It is too cruel, too unjust; dear cousin, be reasonable, be like yourself. Whatever sin I have committed against you has been done in ignorance. I shall never cease to be grateful to you; never cease to feel affectionately towards you. Be generous, cousin Philip; tell me that you forgive me."

"Forgive you!" cried the man in a blind fury. "To the last hour of my life—if I live to be a hundred years old—I will never speak to you again! I pray God I may never see your face any more!"

And with those words upon his lips he went out of the room, went away from her, with a sullen determination to hate those two who had wronged him until the end of his days.

He left the house at once, and roamed away into the dreariest outskirt of the city, a desert track where there were buildings newly begun, abandoned skeletons of houses, and a wide margin of brickfields. All the night through he rambled about this dismal region, with a fever in his brain, and no consciousness of fatigue, no consciousness even of the scene around him. If any one had told him he had been walking on the shore by some roaring sea, he could only by circumstantial evidence have perceived the falsehood involved in the assertion.

It was in the broad summer sunshine that he went home; his clothes whitened with dust and stained with the night dews, his face wan and haggard. Laborers going to their work in the early morning stopped to stare at him as he passed them. One of the sour-faced maid-servants was cleaning the door-step when he went in, and gazed at him aghast, but he scarcely saw her. He washed himself and changed his clothes with a half-mechanical sense of the proprieties, and then went down to that every-day parlor which had a little while ago seemed to him

such a pleasant home-like room. There was a solitary-looking breakfast-table laid for one; and instead of Catherine Paroldi's presence there was a little note addressed to Philip Rayner; a tender, pleading little letter, assuring him once again of her gratitude for his goodness to a friendless orphan, beseeching him once more to be generous and forgiving, and telling him that, let him act towards her as he would, she would never cease to be his grateful and affectionate Catherine.

He read the letter three times with a fierce hungry look in his face, a rage of mingled hate and love, then crushed it in his hand, and flung it into the empty grate. And having done that, he determined to recommence his life upon a new system; to shut that false girl's image out of his mind, to devote all his energies and all his thoughts to business.

The first letter he wrote when he had seated himself at his desk in his private counting-house, for the first time since his journey, was a brief epistle to George Tolson, informing him that his services were no longer required, and that if he preferred any pecuniary compensation instead of the ordinary term of notice, such a course would be more agreeable to the feelings of his obedient servant, Philip Rayner.

The answer to this was prompt enough. It told the new chief of Rayner, Rayner, and Sons, that Mr. Tolson required neither notice nor compensation, and that he should have quitted the office for ever before his note could be delivered to Mr. Rayner.

"He will find another situation, I suppose," Philip said to himself, "for the scoundrel is clever. He had a hundred and fifty a year with us; he will scarcely get so much elsewhere. At best it can only be genteel beggary, a perpetual struggle for bare existence. And what is there that I could have denied her if she had married me? She will think of that sometimes, surely."

How far Philip Rayner succeeded in shutting out the image of the girl he had loved was best known to himself. From the

hour on which he left her on the night of his father's funeral he never spoke of her again to any human creature. Whatever curiosity he may have felt as to her fate, he kept locked in his own breast, making no attempt to discover what became of her.

It was from this time forth that he spoke of himself as a good hater. He had a kind of sullen pride in his hatred of George Tolson and Catherine Paroldi. And yet, as it has been said before, he would, no doubt, have called himself a Christian. He had always been a good man of business; but from the hour of his disappointment he devoted himself to the dryasdust labors of his daily life with a new energy. His father had left him a rich man, and every year added to his wealth, while his expenses diminished instead of increasing. The faithful butler retired to live upon his savings and his dead master's legacy in a congenial retreat beyond Wapping, and Philip made no attempt to supply his place. He was waited upon after this by the middle-aged housemaid, who had amassed money in the savings-bank, and acquired some distinction in a community of Primitive Methodists, whose place of worship was in a darksome lane near the East-India Docks. He was quite content with this reduction of his former state. It was a means of saving money, and he had a stolid satisfaction in the accumulation of his wealth.

The years passed, and he lived on, without change of any kind, in the dull old city house. Friends he had none. The only man he had ever made a companion was George Tolson. Acquaintances of course he had in the way of business—people who thought well of him, and would fain have had him for a guest at their houses; but he refused all invitations. The gloomy solitude of the old house near the Tower best suited his gloomy humor. People asked him sometimes why he did not buy a place at Clapham or Dulwich or Norwood, and live more in accordance with his fortunes; he always told them, with the same dreary smile, that he did not care for the country, he was fond of London. One day a bolder spirit than the rest asked

him plainly why he had never married. The dark look with which Philip Rayner answered the question put an effectual stop to all further inquiries upon *that* head.

So his life went on, buying and selling, and daily growing richer; coming home every day to the same lonely room; eating and drinking sparingly in solitude; sitting alone through the long evening, with a neglected book lying on the table before him, or wandering alone in the familiar streets and in the suburban roads that he had trodden long ago with George Tolson; and for any pleasure or variety there was in his life, he might as well have been some wretched galley-slave, toiling under the sunshine of southern France. So the years went by, and brought him no tidings of those he hated, no mutation in his own monotonous life. It was ten years after she had left his house when he saw Catherine Paroldi, or Catherine Tolson, as of course she must be now. She flashed past him one winter's afternoon at dusk, in a crowded city street, a tall slim figure, dressed in black, with great dark eyes and a wan face. It was only when she had passed him some moments that he knew, by the quickened beating of his heart, who it was that had been so near to him. He turned, and would fain have followed her, impelled by a strange curiosity to learn the circumstances of her life, but she was lost in the crowd by the time he had recovered himself so far as to be able to look about for her.

Great heaven, how her face haunted him after that November twilight! She was poor—he was sure of that; he had read as much even in his brief glimpse of that wan face; poor and careworn, alone in the city street; jostled by the crowd, hurrying homeward to some sordid refuge; *she* for whom life should have been one bright holiday, had she chosen to be his wife. He laughed aloud as he thought of his money, and the home he could have given her. Not that dull city mansion which served well enough for him, but a suburban palace set in a fairy-land of gardens, carriages, lackeys, diamonds to crown the pale brow. O God, how different life might have been for both of them had she but loved him! He hated her with a double hatred as he

thought of what they had each lost; hated her for the wrong done to herself as well as for the wrong done to him.

He took out his bank-book that night, the modest parchment-bound volume in which a prosperous trader is apt to find a more soothing influence than in the brightest dreams of poets or the most profound philosophizing of sages. Yes, a loose thousand or two had accumulated since he had last taken a survey of his affairs; a little more to invest in some safe and profitable way, in India bonds or unimpeachable railway debentures. A couple of thousand pounds! and that poor pinched face of hers had looked as if a ten-pound note would have been a boon to her.

"I never thought that George Tolson would succeed in life," Philip Rayner said to himself that night; "he was too volatile. Clever, I admit, but with that sort of superficial cleverness which seldom helps a man to make a fortune."

From that time forward the face that had flashed past him in the crowded street was always with him. She had haunted him before in her girlish grace and beauty; she came before him now like the sad shadow of some wandering soul in Hades, and still he told himself that he hated her. What was her poverty to him? If she had been on her knees before him pleading for help, he would have been as deaf as stone to her prayers. She had chosen for herself; let her abide the issue.

It was more than a year after this when he saw the man who had once been his friend, George Tolson. The two men met at an obscure street corner near the Royal Exchange, Philip returning from an agreeable visit to his stockbroker's, the other emerging suddenly from a public-house, a gaunt shabby figure, with a haggard unshaven face.

A faint flush lit up the careworn face as the man recognized the son of his old employer, and he made as if he would have spoken to him; but Philip Rayner brushed past him and hurried on, very pale, and with a dark forbidding countenance. No, there was nothing but hatred in his heart for this man. George Tolson looked after him, irresolute, for a minute or so, then gave a heavy sigh, and walked slowly on. Whatever vague

hope might have impelled him to approach that sometime friend died out at sight of the pale angry face.

Thus Philip Rayner twice lost the opportunity of discovering the fate of these two people who had once been so much to him.

And yet there were times when he would have given the world to know how they fared; whether they had drained the cup of misfortune to the very dregs, and whether Catherine repented the sacrifice she had made. Do what he would, work as hard as he would, he could not banish her from his thoughts. The contemplation of his own prosperity was a pleasant thing enough, but her sad face came between him and that image of the golden calf which he had set up for himself. Was he sorry for her? No, surely not. He was not made of the stuff to forgive such a wrong as he had suffered. He was a good hater.

Another year had gone, and Philip Rayner was forty years of age. It was his birthday; a dull, sunless day late in October, with a cruel easterly wind blowing all day long. Rather a dreary occasion, a birthday for a man who stands quite alone in the world. No one congratulated Philip Rayner upon this completion of another year in his life, not even his servants, for he had long ago dropped all ceremonial on such anniversaries, and no bottle of wine was opened in the kitchen for the drinking of the master's health. He was a man who abjured all sentiment, and yet his loneliness, his utter isolation, did strike him just a little painfully on this particular day. And it must needs be always so, for all the years to come. He had not a friend in the world. He might live forty years more, and see forty more such birthdays, in the same dull old house, in the same death-like silence and solitude. For the first time he felt as if those grim panelled walls were horrible to him. They seemed to close in upon him like the walls of a vault. He started up from his fireside in a sudden paroxysm of despondency, and hurried out of the house. Once in the open air it mattered to him nothing where he went. The clocks were striking seven, and the traffic of the day was for the most part

over. He had the streets almost to himself. It was a supreme relief to him to have left that silent shadowy parlor, always haunted now by the ghost of what once had been, and to be out under the open sky. He walked on, careless where he went, crossed London-bridge, and made his way far out by obscure streets and bye-roads till he found himself in a dismal neighborhood beyond Walworth—a bleak barren outskirt, where there was a ghastly patch of waste ground that had once been a common, hemmed in by shabby streets of new-built houses, the greater part of which seemed to be still untenanted.

The exploration of these sordid streets afforded some kind of amusement to Philip Rayner. Perhaps it was pleasant to him to contrast the squalor which prevailed in this small obscure world, making itself manifest in a hundred trivial ways, with his own prosperous conditon. If he had no one else to wish him joy upon his birthday, he could at least congratulate himself upon his wealth, and wonder how these people endured the burden of their existence; he who, an hour ago, had rushed out of his comfortable home, unable to bear the sudden agony of its solitude, the thought of all the monotonous joyless years that he was to live in it.

The dwellers in this region were, at least, not lonely. Wherever he caught a glimpse of a lighted room, he saw a family group assembled. He heard children's voices here and there through open doors, or a couple of matrons gossiping sociably on a door-step. These wretched creatures seemed almost happy in spite of their poverty. It gave him an angry feeling to think that it was so; that so little was needed for happiness, and that he had missed it.

He turned presently into a darker and lonelier street than the rest, where there were more empty houses and an air of desolation more profound than anything he had seen elsewhere. Yet the houses were better and larger than those in the neighborhood, with little bits of garden ground before them.

Here all was so silent that Philip Rayner could hear the low suppressed sobbing of a child who stood on the opposite side of

the road, looking down at something on the ground, with clasped hands, a humble image of despair. He was not a hard-hearted man in a general way, and could not witness a child's distress quite unmoved. He crossed the street quickly, and went up to the child. She was a small delicate-looking girl, with an air of shabby gentility, and a pale thoughtful little face; a girl who might have been any age from eight to twelve.

"What is the matter, my child?" Philip asked kindly.

"The medicine, sir; the medicine for mamma," the girl answered, still looking down at the ground, where Philip now perceived the relics of a broken bottle. "It is very particular, and very dear. I had to fetch it from the chemist's, and it slipped out of my hand somehow just as I was close to home, and yet I meant to be so careful. O dear, dear, dear, what can I do?"

"Why, leave off crying, to be sure, my little maiden, and get another bottle of medicine. That is the best thing to be done."

"But the money, sir. I oughtn't to say such things to a stranger, but it was the last there was in the house. There's no more. Mamma will have to go without the medicine, and she's so very, very ill."

"That she shall not, little one. Come back to the chemist with me, and I'll find plenty of money for him."

"O, will you really, sir? How good, how very good!"

The girl clasped her hands, and looked up at him with a rapturous face. They were standing just under the solitary lamp of the street. What was it in the little one's face that moved him with a sudden thrill? Something, a look, an air, that brought back another face, seldom absent from him now. And yet there was no special likeness between those two faces. The girl's eyes were blue, her hair a pale auburn. It was in expression alone that she could resemble Catherine Paroldi in the decline of her beauty. But the expression was there—a pleading piteous look that went straight to his heart. And he had no

reason to steel his mind against this child. He might indulge the fanciful feeling which that vague something in her looks had awakened in him; he might be kind to this poor waif and stray, without any derogation from the dignity of his hate.

It was rather a long walk to the high road where the chemist lived, and he had plenty of time to study the little creature who walked so patiently beside him, looking up in his face and answering all his questions with a meek gratitude that touched him profoundly. It was so small a thing that he was doing; a matter of a couple of shillings, perhaps, at most. How friendless the poor must needs be, when such a trifling service seemed so much to them!

The girl was eleven years old, the eldest of the family. There were three other little ones at home, two girls and a boy. Papa's name was Turner. He had been very unfortunate, could not get a situation in the city, and was earning a very little now by writing for some obscure newspaper. He was very clever, the child said, but not so good as mamma. And poor mamma had felt all the trouble so much, and it had made her very ill. It was her heart, the doctor said.

All this the little girl told him with childish frankness, and yet with the womanly tone of a child whom hard experience has made older than her years. They found the chemist's shop still open, had the prescription made up again, and then Philip Rayner, loth to lose sight of the little girl just yet, or to leave her unprotected in the streets, went back with her. She entreated him earnestly not to put himself out of his way on her account. She was quite accustomed to be out as late as that, she said; but he would take no denial, and went home with her, impelled by a strange curiosity to see the place where she lived.

She led him into the parlor, a bare wretched-looking room, though it was clean, and there had evidently been some feeble attempt to make things comfortable. The furniture was of the scantiest and the shabbiest—a rickety-looking Pembroke table, and three or four dilapidated cane chairs. That was all. An

unkempt servant-maid, a mere girl of fifteen or so, emerged from the back premises as they went into the little passage, carrying a tallow candle, by the light of which Philip Rayner took his first survey of the parlor. It seemed as if the child divined the meaning of that look.

"It's not our furniture," she said; "that was taken away for the rent, more than a month ago. Some kind neighbors lent us these things, and the landlord let us stay till the house is let; when it is, we must go."

"What a time you've been, Miss Mary!" exclaimed the servant, looking rather curiously at the unknown visitor. "Your mar has been frightened about you."

"I had an accident with the medicine, Sally. I shouldn't have been able to bring any at all, but for this gentleman's kindness."

The unkempt hand-maiden, who was evidently of a soft-hearted nature, threw up her hands and stared at the stranger with goggle-eyed admiration.

"It's not many friends you've got, poor child, goodness knows," she said. "It's well there's some can feel for you."

"And mamma?" asked the little girl eagerly. "Has she been better while I've been away, Sally?"

"She's been very quiet," the servant answered dubiously, "but you know she's always that. Complaints never pass her lips."

"And have the children slept?"

"Like tops, Miss Mary. I only wished you'd been in bed along of 'em, as you ought to be at your age."

"Yes," responded Philip; "it's late for this poor child to be about, and she seems a most fragile little creature."

"Ah, sir," replied the servant, with a groan, "if you knew what that child goes through, and how patient she is, and what a head she has, beyond her years! She's kep the house together somehow, when things must all have gone to ruin but for her. And as to me—there, I haven't had a halfpenny for wages or beer-money for the last six months, and have hard words be-

sides from master when he's out of sorts. But, lor, I haven't got the heart to leave *her.*"

"No, no, Sally dear, you couldn't leave me," said the child, clinging to her.

Philip Rayner looked down at them, wondering at them and at this new glimpse of life. The child was such a little lady in the midst of her poverty, had such an air of grace and refinement in her premature womanliness, that he was more interested in her than he could have believed it possible for him to be in a creature so far away from himself. He stood looking down at her, wondering what he could best do to help her, and as shy and awkward as if he had found himself suddenly in the presence of a duchess.

"I shall come back to-morrow evening to inquire how your mamma is, Miss Turner," he said, "if you have no objection."

"O, no, no, indeed; I am so grateful to you."

Then he shuffled out of the place somehow, contriving as he departed to slip a half-sovereign into the palm of the slipshod handmaiden. He had a notion that anything given to the servant would be for the general benefit, and he could not, for the life of him, have offered money to the child, although she had so freely confessed their poverty.

He thought of her many times next day in the midst of his business, and at dusk drove to the house in a cab, carrying all manner of small luxuries which he fancied might be of use to the invalid; a hamper containing half-a-dozen bottles of the choicest wine in the cellar, a basket of rare hot-house grapes, a package of superfine tea, some tin cases of preserved soup. This sensation of doing something personally for the good of another was quite a new feeling to him, and seemed to give a zest to his life. Perhaps he had felt the utter loneliness and uselessness of his long blank evenings more than he had ever confessed to himself.

He was not content even with taking these things to the invalid; but catching sight of a gay-looking fancy repository on his way through the Borough, stopped the cab and alighted to

buy a glittering workbox for his little favorite. It might not be of much use to her, but it would please her; he was sure of that.

He found the parlor very neat and clean, a little bit of fire burning brightly in the small grate, and Mary Turner at work by the light of one tall candle, which made her look very small. He was evidently expected, and she flushed with pleasure when the maid announced him as "the strange gentleman."

But what was this compared with her rapture when she saw the treasures he had brought her! The wine—

"O sir," she cried with clasped hands, "the doctor had said so often that mamma ought to have wine, and we *could* not give it to her. You are like an angel come down from heaven!"

And then the fruit, big purple grapes, with a powdery bloom upon them; and then the tea. Poor mamma was so fond of tea; it was the only thing she really did care for, and the tea they got in that neighborhood was so bad, and often they had been obliged to go without any. How should she ever thank him enough? she asked in her delight.

"I don't want any thanks. It is a great pleasure to me to be able to do this small service for you. I would do much more, believe me."

He stayed there some time; saw her open one of the wine-bottles deftly—they had first to send to a neighbor to borrow a corkscrew—and fill a glass with the rich golden-hued Madeira, and then place a plate with a few grapes on a little tray beside it, to carry upstairs to her mother. He waited to hear how mamma had taken the wine—it had been great work to make her drink it all, it was so strong and good—and how she had admired the grapes; and how she thanked him for his goodness with all her heart. And then he gave Mary her workbox, and saw her blue eyes opened to their widest as she admired the precious mother-of-pearl fittings, and the dainty quilted blue silk.

"You couldn't have given me a better present," she said. "I have a great deal of work to do, for I make all the things for my little brothers and sisters."

She might better have said she mended all the things, for there was much more mending than making to be done in that establishment.

"What have I done to deserve such kindness from you?" she exclaimed, gazing at her open workbox in a rapture of contentment.

"You have encountered misfortune nobly," he answered.

She looked at him wonderingly; it seemed such a strange thing to her to be praised and rewarded for doing what it was so natural for her to do.

Before he left her, he contrived to ascertain the address of the landlord, and called upon him before going home that night. The man was a small publican in the neighborhood, and gave Mr. Rayner the history of his tenants readily enough.

They had occupied his house nearly two years, and had paid their rent pretty well for the first twelve months, but after that had got altogether behindhand, so that he had been obliged to send in a broker and sell them up. "But after I'd done it, I hadn't the heart to turn them out, sir," said the landlord. "That child, the eldest girl—a slip of a creature, but with a woman's spirit in her bit of a body—begged and prayed of me, and the mother was ill, and so on, and I let 'em stay. I haven't even made an attempt to let the house, though I told the girl they must go when it is let. The mother's a good soul, I believe, and worked at her needle like a galley-slave till she fell ill. The father isn't much good; an idle scoundrel, I fancy. He was clerk somewhere in the city when they took the house, but he lost his situation somehow a year ago, and now he's on some newspaper, not earning much over a pound a week. There's no margin for a man to pay back debts in that."

No, Philip Rayner was fain to confess that there is not much margin for anything in a pound a week, after food and raiment for a family have been provided out of it. What was he to do for these people? It was all very well to indulge his sympathetic feeling for the little girl, but he did not want to do any-

thing quixotic, or to burden himself with the maintenance of an unknown pauper household for the rest of his days. He wanted to be prudent, and yet to help them.

"I don't think you'll lose by your kindness in the long run," he said to the landlord. "I shouldn't like these people to be turned adrift, not while the mother's ill, at any rate; and I should be glad to pay you a quarter's rent in advance, dating from to-night, to secure them three months' shelter, leaving the arrears *in statu quo.*"

"That's kindly, sir," answered the man, "and I'm agreeable."

So Philip Rayner paid him something over a five-pound note, and took a formal receipt for a quarter's rent of 11, Belvidere-street, East Walworth.

As he drove home that night, he remembered the existence of some spare furniture stowed away in a lumber room at the top of his house, substantial old-fashioned stuff, good old bedding, some faded damask curtains, excellent in its way, but superannuated, and put aside some fifty years ago, when the best bedrooms had been refurnished in the unlovely fashion of the Regency. He was up in this lumber-room at day-break, making a selection from these stores, and on his way to the office ordered a carman he sometimes employed to take the things he had chosen to Belvidere-street that afternoon, but, as he valued Mr. Rayner's custom and good-will, the man was to be sure and hold his tongue as to where and whom the things came from.

"I want to help some people in reduced circumstances, and don't want to give them a claim on me in the future," he said; "you are a man of the world enough to understand that, I'm sure, Potts."

When Philip Rayner went to Walworth in the evening—and it seemed to him the most natural thing in the world for him to go there—he found the parlors made quite splendid by means of these superannuated chairs and tables which he had found in the lumber room. Mary and the faithful Sally had been busy ever since the goods arrived, arranging and rearranging. There was a long narrow couch by the fireplace, a couch of strictly

classic form, and the hardest thing imaginable in couches; but to Mary's fancy, upholsterer never devised anything more elegant or more luxurious. There was a solid table instead of the rickety Pembroke, a comfortable square arm-chair for papa to sit in of a morning when he wrote.

"The curtains are up in mamma's room," cried Mary; "they make it so warm and comfortable, and there were such draughts before. Of course the things come from you; I have not even wondered about them. It's like the story of Aladdin, and you are the genius of the lamp."

He stayed with her for two hours or more that evening, hearing her half-childish, half-womanly talk about this furniture. It was a delight to her to tell him her little old-fashioned arrangements; it was a delight to him to listen. Discovering by chance that the devoted Sally was in the habit of spending her evenings with her young mistress, there being no fire in the kitchen, and that apartment being moreover pervaded by a peculiarly audacious sort of black-beetle, which made nothing of human presence, but rioted at its pleasure after nightfall, he insisted that his visits should cause no alteration in this custom. Upon which, with much hesitation, Sally was induced to appear, and took her seat by the farthermost corner of the table, provided with something rather formidable in the way of needlework.

"You see, papa is never at home of an evening," Mary said, in explanation of this arrangement. "He is obliged to be at the newspaper office every night."

And then she went on to tell Philip how grateful her father was for his goodness, and how glad he should be to have any opportunity of thanking him in person, which kind of demonstration Philip Rayner, who was by reason of his lonely habits one of the shyest of men, was religiously determined to escape. If he had not been secure of finding Mary alone of an evening, his visits to Belvidere-street would have speedily ceased.

But Mary was always alone, and he came night after night. He had begun even to wonder what he should do with his

evenings when there was no longer any excuse for his coming. Very rarely did he appear empty-handed, and he exhibited a marvellous ingenuity in the judicious selection and variety of his offerings. The younger children had been presented to him, and he catered for their small wants with an almost child-like delight in childish things. It was so new to him to be interested in any human creature, so new for him to live out of himself. But he never gave Mary money. It seemed to him that to do that would have been to vulgarize their friendship. He slipped a liberal donation into the servant's hand from time to time, and he could see, by the increased comfort and order of all things in the house, that his gifts were employed, as he had fancied they would be, for the general good.

Of course he heard a great deal about Mrs. Turner as his intimacy with Mary increased—how nobly she had borne their poverty, how patiently she had worked, now giving music or singing lessons for the small recompense to be obtained in a poor locality, now toiling incessantly at her needle. She was very clever, the girl said, and papa too, and yet they had found it so hard to live. He heard all about her slow progress from a state of utter prostration towards recovery, and how hopeful the doctor was now—the kind doctor who had a great practice in the Camberwell-road, and yet came to them three times a week without any fee. And so the time went on till Philip had known Mary more than a month, and Mrs. Turner was now strong enough to sit up a little in the early part of every day, and would soon be able to come down-stairs.

"And when she does come down you will let her thank you, won't you?" the child pleaded. "You won't avoid her as you have avoided papa." It was a hard thing for Philip Rayner to say yes, but the child seemed to have set her heart upon this business, and he could not refuse to please her.

"I don't want any thanks, my dear," he said; "what I have done has been done for my own pleasure. But—but if you really wish it, I shall be happy to see your mamma."

In all this time he had never told Mary his name or abode.

If he had been indeed the genius of the lamp, she would have known as much about his worldly circumstances as she knew now—nor had the child ever evinced the faintest curiosity. It seemed her nature to be a lady.

At last the important day came. Mamma was well enough to spend an afternoon down-stairs. There was to be a little tea-drinking in honor of the event, and Philip Rayner had consented to come much earlier than usual in order to assist at this ceremonial. He had to leave business before his usual time, and to go without his dinner, in order to do this; but he thought nothing of those small sacrifices. He felt nothing but a sense of shyness in being presented to a stranger whom he had benefited.

He found Mary watching for him at the garden-gate, bleak and cold as the weather was, without shawl or bonnet, and with her pale auburn hair blowing in the wintry wind. She clapped her hands joyfully when she saw him.

"Everything is ready," she said, "and the parlor looks so nice mamma won't know it. She'll think the fairies have been really at work. Come and see. She's not down yet, but is to come down in a few minutes."

Yes, the parlor looked very snug and comfortable. Such a ruddy little fire; such sparkling tea-things, Britannia metal polished till it was brighter than most people's silver; and muffins and marmalade, and unheard of luxuries of that kind, and an all-pervading odor of tea and toast. The inexorable classic sofa was wheeled close to the fire ready for mamma; papa was not at home—that newspaper absorbed a great deal of his time.

Philip Rayner took his seat where Mary told him, in the post of honor opposite the invalid's sofa. Her radiant joyous face moved him deeply. To think that such small things could give so much happiness, and that he had missed it. That was always the burden of his thoughts at such times. He sat where she placed him, waiting for the convalescent's appearance.

Presently there came the sound of a light feeble step upon the

stairs, then the faint rustling of a woman's dress, and then the door was opened softly, and a lady came in. Tall, and slim, and pale, with great dark eyes.

He started to his feet with a loud cry:

"Catherine!"

Yes, it was she; not the bright Catherine of his youth, but the wan faded woman who flashed past him in the city street —faded, and yet most beautiful to him in the wreck of her loveliness—the woman he had sworn to hate, whose face he had prayed God he might never look upon again.

She echoed his cry faintly, and tottered a few paces forwards as if she would have fallen at his feet; but he caught her in his arms, and held her to his breast, looking down at her with a tender smile.

"Catherine," he said, "do you remember the first time I kissed you? Once more, my love, only once more," and he pressed his lips upon the pale care-worn forehead. "There was selfish passion in that first kiss. Remorse and forgiveness are in this."

After this there came explanations; and she told her cousin of the evil days that had fallen upon her since her marriage, and how, in the last place where they lived, they had been so deeply in debt and so utterly unable to pay, that they had been fain to leave by stealth, and to enter a new neighborhood under an assumed name, lest their creditors should follow them. There were no words needed to tell how bitter this had been to the woman's honorable mind, or how the man's character had deteriorated before it came to this. She spoke of him with unvarying love and gentleness, but she did not pretend that he had been blameless.

"I think he might have done better if he had had one friend to help him," she said plaintively; "but he had none. We were quite friendless."

"He shall have a friend in future," Philip answered promptly; "he shall come back to my office. He has formed bad habits, perhaps; never mind, Catherine, we will cure him of them. It

was I who turned him adrift. I owe him an atonement. His debts shall be paid, and he shall come to me on better terms than when he left the firm; and you, and Mary, and the little ones, must have a pretty cottage farther away, somewhere in the country, where my sweet pale lily will blossom into a rose."

He laid his hand tenderly upon the child's head. "My darling," he said, "I think my love for you has made me a new man."

Nor did his love for her change. She was always the delight of his life; and in the days to come, Mary Tolson became a great heiress, the beloved adopted daughter of that man whose favorite boast had been that he was "a good hater."

THE DREADED GUEST.

BLEAK December night nearly a hundred years ago. Hard frost, and a keen biting wind blowing the snowflakes into the faces of those few foot-passengers who still tramp the half-deserted city streets; a frost so hard, that the fast falling snow does not change to mud and slush all in a moment, after the usual manner of London snow, but lies crisp and white upon road and pavement, and crowns the steep roofs and gables with mountainous heaps of whiteness, which overhang the parapets, and threaten pedestrians with the fall of miniature avalanches.

There are retired nooks and corners of this crowded London city where the snow might lie almost as pure and undefiled as in some silent Alpine gorge known only to the eagle and the chamois—notably, one narrow little street, scarcely better than a court or alley, in the region of Moorfields; an eminently respectable street in its way, tenanted by two or three working jewellers, a Dutch merchant in some small way of trade, the chief clerk in a great colonial house under the shadow of the monument, and Dr. Prestwitch.

One feeble oil-lamp glimmers at the entrance to this quiet little street—which leads nowhere, by the way, Dr. Prestwitch's house facing the explorer, and barring his farther progress except through Dr. Prestwitch's hall-door—one dim blear-eyed

little lamp, which does not do much towards the illumination of the street in a general way. But to-night there is the lightness and brightness of the snow, which lies thick upon the paved footway between the two rows of tall narrow houses, unmarked by a single footfall. The occupants of Little Bell-street are a sober steady-going people, and there has been no traffic, not so much as the opening or shutting of a door, since eight o'clock this evening.

It is now eleven.

As an auxiliary to the public lamp, Dr. Prestwitch burns a little colored lamp of his own under the wooden shell that surmounts his doorway—a relic of former splendor, when great people lived in the city, and fashionable bachelors or small gentry with large pretensions may have occupied Little Bell-street; a lamp which announces his profession to the world at large, keeps him in the eye of the public as it were, and which has more than once brought him a chance patient—some ruffian bruised and mangled in a street-fight, a child run over in a neighboring thoroughfare, a black eye, or a sprained ankle.

There is one tall narrow window upon each side of Dr. Prestwitch's tall narrow door, and in the extreme left corner of Dr. Prestwitch's house there is a passage, scarcely wide enough to admit one person of bulky figure, leading to Dr. Prestwitch's back premises—the surgery where he compounds his medicines and spreads his plasters, and a bleak bare room, with a long deal table on tressels, and a smaller leaden-topped table fitted with a sink. This room is very rarely used by the doctor, never entered by the doctor's family, and has a mouldy odor.

In the time of this December snow-storm Dr. Prestwitch was quite a young man; a young man with a bright eager face, dark curling hair, which he did not often disguise with powder and pomatum, and a bright, eager manner; a man who had given hostages to Fortune in the shape of a pretty little wife and three small children, and who was perhaps rather too anxious to succeed in life. It is doubtful whether this young surgeon had any legal right to the title of doctor, but the neighborhood of

Little Bell-street had made him a doctor by common consent. The brass plate upon his stout oak door described him simply as "Mr. Prestwitch, Surgeon."

He had not a large practice, and the task of supporting that small household was a hard one, simple as were the needs of the pretty little wife and the three small children. They had one servant, a fat over-grown girl, with a shock of red hair, and a countenance in which good temper did duty for all other charms; a stupid honest creature, who heartily loved the doctor's wife and children, and thought the doctor himself the greatest man of his age. The daily meals in that respectable house in Little Bell-street were apt to be meagre in quantity and inferior in quality; but Barbara Snaffles—commonly called Bab—was a faithful soul, who would have shared the diet of Count Ugolino and his sons without a murmur, if fidelity had demanded such patience. As it was she had a fair share of whatever was eaten or drunken in the house, and was treated more like a member of the family than was perhaps consistent with the dignity of a professional man's household.

On this particular December night she was sitting darning stockings upon one side of the hearth in the every-day parlor—a small panelled chamber, furnished in the scantiest way, but with a certain air of neatness and even comfort nevertheless—while her mistress occupied the other. A handful of fire burnt cheerily in the old-fashioned grate—such a roomy old grate, with such a capacity for the consumption of fuel, but pinched and contracted by an artful contrivance of brickwork on each side. The red-worsted curtains, a trifle scanty even for the narrow window, but very comfortable looking notwithstanding, had been drawn to their extremest stretch; the honest mahogany table had been vigorously polished by Bab after the removal of the tea-things; the one candle was kept carefully snuffed; the cat reposed luxuriously against the open-work side of the bright brass fender; and this room, altogether humble as it was, bore the unmistakable aspect of home.

The doctor was in his surgery reading. He was a studious

young man, and in the dearth of more profitable employment devoted his evenings to the study of medical science. It had been a matter of no small regret to him that he had been unable to advance very far in the practical study of that branch of his profession which seemed to him the most important, the study of anatomy. The cost of a subject for his experiments rendered this part of his science almost a sealed book to the poor and hard working student, who could not afford to avail himself of the services of those gangs of desperate ruffians who were continually violating the sanctity of the grave by their unholy traffic.

Martin Prestwitch had a friend, however, in the house-surgeon of Newgate, and that gentleman, who had a surfeit of subjects sometimes, had promised to send him the first defunct criminal he should be able to dispose of in a friend's favor. There were outstanding claims to be considered first, for the jail was in those days the only legitimate resource for the student; but whenever there should be a subject to *spare*, it was to be for Martin Prestwitch.

He had been reading hard in an old book upon anatomy this evening, and his fingers itched to be using the scalpel.

"I'm afraid Jack Tylney has forgotten his promise," he said presently, with a sigh.

He was wrong. Mr. Tylney, the Newgate surgeon, had not forgotten the obligation that was upon him. His promise was destined to be kept that very night. The first footsteps to defile the snow that had remained untrodden through all the quiet evening hours were the footsteps of two men carrying a ghastly burden.

They took it first to the hall-door, where one of them stooped to read the name upon the brass plate, and then knocked—a cautious, mysterious-sounding knock.

The door was opened almost immediately by the faithful Barbara, who scented a possible patient in this untimely summons; but at the sight of that ghastly burden—it was muffled in a sack, but there are some things that will not be hidden—she fell back with a start.

"Lord save us! what's that?" she cried.

"A subject for Dr. Prestwitch—the man that was hung for coining at Newgate this morning."

"What!" exclaimed Bab, "do you mean to say it's a dead body?"

"Yes, miss," one of the bearers answered, with a grin; "not to make too many bones about it, it's a stiff un—with Mr. Tylney's compliments to Dr. Prestwitch."

"Take the dreadful thing round to the surgery," said Barbara, aghast. "Master's in there reading. Take it down that passage; I'll come and open the door directly in a minute.—And to think that any one can wish to have such a thing!" she ejaculated, as she shut the front door.

She had heard her master talk of that subject which Jack Tylney was to send him.

She opened the surgery-door and told the doctor what had come for him, and then opened the door leading into the passage, where the men were waiting. Martin Prestwitch was all on the alert in a moment. He took his candle, led the way into that damp-smelling room set apart for such a purpose as this, and so rarely used. The horror was carried in there, and laid upon the long deal table, Barbara Snaffles standing on the threshold all the time and peering in, fascinated by the ghastly sight. Then Martin Prestwitch and the men came out, and the doctor dismissed them with a shilling to buy drink—one of his few shillings.

He locked the door of his dissecting-room, while Barbara stood a little aloof, open-mouthed, devouring the scene with her big round eyes.

"Ask your mistress to make me some of her good coffee, Bab," said the doctor—"I shall sit up late to-night; and be sure she knows nothing of this business," he added, pointing to the locked door.

"Lord bless you! no, sir; not for the world. I don't want to turn that poor dear's whole mask of blood, as mine was turned just now when I saw that orful thing in a sack."

Barbara gave a gulp and made a wry face as she spoke.

"You'd better come and say good-night to missus, sir, if you want her to go to bed."

"Ay, to be sure," answered Martin Prestwitch, at all times an affectionate husband, but just at this moment somewhat distracted by the thought of that inanimate clay lying upon his table.

He went into the parlor, where his industrious little wife was singing softly to herself, as she put the finishing touches to a triumph of ingenuity and economics in the shape of a frock for the biggest of the three small children, made out of a cast-off petticoat of her own.

"See, Martin," she cried, looking up at him with her bright loving face, "won't Molly look nice in that?"

"Very nice, dear; but you oughtn't to sit up so late, sewing for Molly. It's nearly twelve o'clock."

"That's the very last stitch, Martin; and it's just as late for you, sir, as it is for me; and you've not had a morsel of supper either. There's the bit of beefsteak pudding that was left at dinner. Bab has warmed it nicely, and there it is, waiting for you, down in the fender."

"I'll eat it by and by, dear; but I've no appetite for supper just yet. I want you to make me a cup of coffee—as strong as you like."

"What, Martin! you're not going to sit up over your fusty old books again?" cried the little wife dolefully.

It was a common thing for the doctor to sit poring over his medical books deep into the night, and Mary Prestwitch had often crept down-stairs in the gray morning, to find him still studying one of those dismal volumes, with his candle burned down to the socket.

"Yes, Mary, my dear; I want to sit up an hour or so longer. There's a very interesting case I'm reading up, a case that will be useful to me in my practice; and you know, love, how much depends upon my getting on in my profession."

Mary gave a little nod and a sigh. Yes, indeed, it was vital

to that small household that the surgeon's efforts should be crowned with success. Only that evening, Mrs. Prestwitch and Bab had been calculating the amount of the Christmas bills—Christmas brings so little for struggling householders except bills—and wondering whether the tradespeople would be content with such small sums as Dr. Prestwitch could give them, on account.

"They know that we are honest, Bab," said the anxious wife; "thank Heaven they know that. We have lived in this house five years, and paid our way somehow. I don't think they will find it in their hearts to be hard upon us."

Martin Prestwitch kissed his wife, and sent her off to bed directly she had made the coffee, during which operation there was heard a great clattering of bolts and bars from the indefatigable Barbara, who took as much pains to secure all these fastenings as if her master's house had been the most tempting field for an enterprising burglar. It was just midnight when the little woman tripped up-stairs, with Barbara behind her, and all the clocks of the City seemed to be booming out the hour as Dr. Prestwitch went to his dissecting-room, carrying a steaming jug of coffee in one hand and a candle in the other. He had to put his jug on the floor while he unlocked the door, for there were no superfluous tables or side-boards in the passages of that sparsely-furnished abode. The room struck cold as some ice-bound region on that bleak winter night, and the doctor's first labor was to light a fire. There were happily some wood and coals in a cupboard near the fireplace, and with these and an old newspaper Martin Prestwitch set to work. The task was not an easy one; the grate was damp, the smoke came down the chimney, and well-nigh choked him; but the doctor's patience and energy got the better of these difficulties, and when he rose from his kneeling position before the dingy hearth the fire was burning cheerily.

He refreshed himself with a cup of coffee before proceeding to his more serious labor, and set the jug down upon the

hearth, to keep the remainder of that comfortable beverage warm. Then he set to work in real earnest.

There is no need to enter upon the details of that ghastly performance. Before he had reached more than the preliminary stage of his labor, Dr. Prestwitch came to a full stop, suddenly, with the knife in his hand, arrested by a conviction that had come upon him like a flash of lightning, and set his heart beating with an awful fear.

Another moment, one rapid movement of that skilful hand which held the knife, and he might have been a murderer.

The creature was not dead!

Martin Prestwitch bent down with his ear against the felon's naked chest, and listened.

Yes, there it was, weak and suppressed, but still palpable to the professional ear—the action of the heart.

In the next moment the doctor was at work with the approved means of those days for the revival of suspended animation. It was a slow business, but he was rewarded at last. The coiner gave a great sigh, muttered something that sounded like an oath, and then opened his bloodshot eyes, and stared with a bewildered gaze at his benefactor, the man who had given him back his forfeited life.

"Where the—am I?" he asked; "I thought they were going to hang me. Was there a reprieve?"

"No, there was no reprieve. Mr. Ketch must have bungled over his work, I suppose."

The coiner sat upright, and looked about him; and at this moment it occurred to Martin Prestwitch that he had perhaps been guilty of a kind of felony in giving back life to a man whom the law had doomed to death. The law was a critical thing in those days, involving such a large amount of capital punishment, that Dr. Prestwitch was by no means sure that such an act as assisting in a felon's evasion of the gallows might not be in itself a hanging matter.

But the deed was done; and there sat the coiner, a stalwart

square-built ruffian of near six feet high, a man who could have annihilated the slim surgeon.

"Can't you give a man something to drink?" asked the coiner. "My throat's like a lime-kiln."

Dr. Prestwitch handed him the coffee jug, which he emptied at a draught.

"Cat-lap!" said the coiner contemptuously; "but it's done me good. And now, do you mean to tell me as they hung me this morning? I remember standing on the drop, and feeling the sleet and hail pelting against the blessed night-cap they'd pulled over my face; and I think, of all the blessed cold days I can call to mind, this blessed morning was the coldest. Do you mean to tell me as they made a botch of it, and let me off?"

"So it appears," replied Dr. Prestwitch gently; for although a man of some moral courage, he felt himself at a disadvantage in this tête-à-tête,—"so it appears. All I know is that you were brought here about an hour ago, and introduced to my notice as an individual who had paid the last penalty of the law."

"Brought here? What for?"

"Well—for—in short, for scientific purposes. My name is Prestwitch, and I am a professor of medicine and surgery."

"WHAT!" roared the restored sufferer; "were you going to cut me up?" The coiner looked so ferocious as he asked this question, that Dr. Prestwitch felt as if his last moment had come.

"Don't excite yourself, my good friend," he remonstrated mildly. "If things had been as I had every reason to suppose, you would not have felt the slightest inconvenience. The legitimate ends of science would have been promoted without any suffering on your part. How much happier would you have been in that respect than the dogs and rabbits, whose vivisection has served to demonstrate the theories of some of our great anatomists! As it is, however, you have some reason to be grateful to me, as you owe me your life."

Dr. Prestwitch glanced towards the door, thinking there was

no real necessity that this interview should be prolonged farther, and that this terrible guest of his might be going. Then, all at once, it dawned upon him that there was an obstacle to the coiner's departure. With the exception of the sacking that had muffled him when he was brought to Little Bell-street, he was garmentless; and the sacking was scarcely a costume for a cold winter's night in the streets of London.

"Grateful!" muttered the man. "I don't know as life's much of a favor to a poor devil that doesn't know where to get a mossel of bread; that's marked down by a pack of bloodhounds, and if he doesn't get hung to-day, is pretty safe to get hung to-morrow. You can't give me back my tools, I suppose? I had as pretty a set of moulds and presses as was ever seen, in a cellar down by Lambeth Pallis, for my business, which was a good un till a pal peached upon me. Howsomedever, I make no doubt you meant kindly, and here's my hand upon it."

With that the scoundrel extended a dingy-looking paw, very broad and muscular the doctor observed, and Martin Prestwitch was fain to accept the friendly invitation, and shake hands with the coiner.

"And now, doctor," said the man, wrapping the sacking round him as closely as he could, and planting himself in the single chair by the fire, which he stirred in a manner that showed no mercy to the doctor's coals,—"and now, doctor, since we begin to understand each other, I'll trouble you for something to eat. I had some breakfast at six o'clock this morning—for I wasn't a-going to be put off my feed by Jack Ketch—but I've had nothing since."

"I'll go and see," said Dr. Prestwitch doubtfully, knowing the slender resources of his larder.

He remembered the beefsteak pudding, which had been put aside for his own supper, and which he could gladly have eaten just now, and he presently returned to the dissecting-room with this savoury mess, and a great hunch of bread and a slice of cheese. The coiner devoured these, and then looked about him with the air of a man who could have eaten half an ox or so,

and to whom this light refreshment seemed about as substantial as a handful of lollipops.

"You haven't got any more of that there puddin', I suppose?" he asked rather dolefully.

"Not a morsel."

"Nor a slice of cold beef, or anything in that way?"

"I am sorry to say there is no cold joint in the house."

"And I'm sorry to hear it. You ain't out of bread and cheese, though, I daresay; and I must make up with that. So if you'll bring me the loaf and the cheese, I shall be thankful. Don't take the trouble to cut it. It ain't likely as a gentleman such as you would be able to take the measure of *my* appetite."

Dr. Prestwitch sighed as he went away to comply with this request, distressed to think how bare a look the larder would have next morning at breakfast time. The quartern loaf was shrunk already, the family cheese was only the remnant of a pale-complexioned specimen of the Dutch kind; but it was impossible to refuse submission to the demands of such a guest! So Martin Prestwitch carried these provisions to the coiner, and laid them on the table before him, with a plate and knife.

"Your house don't seem to be too well supplied with victuals, doctor," said the man, eying the pale-faced Dutchman with no special favor.

"I am not a rich man," Martin Prestwitch answered humbly. "I find it a hard thing to live."

"Humph!" muttered the coiner; "that's a common complaint, I suppose. I've had my ups and downs—the fat of the land to-day, and a dry crust to-morrow; and now I've got to begin life again, with the brand of the law upon me, every man's hand against me, and no more mercy to expect from any of 'em than if I was a hunted rat. I should like to know how I'm to set about getting my living when I leave this house to-morrow morning."

Dr. Prestwitch breathed a little more freely. It was some relief to him to learn that this unexpected visitor did contemplate departing in the morning. What a blessed thing it would

be to have him gone! It seemed to the perplexed surgeon as if the burden of this nameless criminal's presence had been weighing him down for months.

The coiner made a fierce dart at the pale cheese, and hewed alternate wedges from that and the loaf, in a half-absent manner, until both were demolished, grumbling to himself the while about the hardness of life, when a poor creature might not manufacture a few guineas for his own use and maintenance, without becoming liable to the stiffest penalties of the law.

"And how I'm to begin work again, with all my tools gone and not a pal as I can trust in, is more than I know," muttered the coiner audibly.

"I really think, my good friend," Dr. Prestwitch suggested gently, "that in your case I should emigrate. A foreign country—a new country especially, like Nova Scotia—might offer a fair field for—" Dr. Prestwitch did not like to say "coining," but concluded with a polite periphrasis—"your particular line of business."

"Emigrate!" exclaimed the coiner contemptuously. "How the deuce"—his actual expression was considerably more forcible; but Dr. Prestwitch, who was always a mild man, used to tell this story in the mildest language, only hinting that his guest's vocabulary had been something beyond the common in the way of rude vernacular vigor—"how the deuce is a man to emigrate who hasn't sixpence towards his passage money? And a nice outfit I've got for emigration!" added the coiner, with a shiver, looking down at the sacking in which he was hugging his burly limbs. "If you want me to emigrate, doctor, you must find the rhino."

"I!" cried Martin Prestwitch, turning a shade paler, though he had been pale enough before. "My good man, what are you dreaming of?"

"Yes, *you*; you brought me back to life, and you're bound to provide for me. I didn't ask you to come any of your reviving dodges over me, did I? I was brought here to be dissected, and it was your duty to dissect me. But you scien-

tific parties are never satisfied without trying your blessed experiments!"

"Good gracious me!" exclaimed Dr. Prestwitch, completely confounded by this blatant ingratitude. "Here is an extraordinary creature! I restore him to life, and he looks upon me as his enemy!"

"I didn't ask to be restored, did I?" grumbled the coiner. "Life's no favor to such as me! Howsomedever, you've revived me, and now you must keep me going; and in the first place, I'll trouble you for a suit of clothes."

"A suit of clothes!" murmured the surgeon in a helpless tone.

"Yes. I can't walk about like this; it's against the laws."

"I have not an extensive wardrobe," said Martin Prestwitch; "and even if I had, my garments would scarcely fit you."

"Well, you are but a poor thread-paper of a man, certainly," answered the coiner, who had perhaps devoured more beef in a week than the surgeon was in the habit of consuming in a quarter; "but any clothes are better than none, and I must screw myself into 'em somehow; so turn 'em out, Mr. Doctor."

"Good gracious me!" exclaimed Dr. Prestwitch again dolefully; "it's like an awful dream."

He went away to do his visitor's bidding. It did really seem to him almost as if he had been walking in his sleep, the victim of some gruesome vision. A cold perspiration bedewed his forehead as he crept up-stairs, candle in hand, to search for garments wherewith to clothe that midnight intruder.

He chose the biggest things he could find—a bottle-green riding-coat with a fur collar, that had belonged to his father (a good and substantial garment, which he had cherished with care, intending to have it cut down and adapted for his own wear on some convenient occasion). It went to his heart to part with this treasure, and he felt the fineness of the cloth with a slow regretful hand, as he flung the garment over his arm. He found a pair of leather knee-breeches that had belonged to the same esteemed parent—a bulkier man than himself—and

with these, a clean linen shirt, and a rusty black brocaded waistcoat of his own garnished with copper lace, he went downstairs.

"I can only *lend* you the coat," he said, as he laid the garments before the coiner; "the breeches and waistcoat you are welcome to keep."

The unknown looked at the things with a somewhat contemptuous expression of countenance, and then proceeded to invest himself in them, splitting the shirt sleeves with his brawny arms, and straining the leathern breeches of the defunct Prestwitch senior with his ponderous legs. The waistcoat he split up the back with a knife, and laced up the opening dexterously with a bit of whipcord which the doctor procured for him. The coat fitted him comfortably, and concealed all deficiencies; but even then there remained his extremities still unclad—his great bare feet and muscular legs—for which Martin Prestwitch must needs find shoes and stockings. With that bottle-green coat and fur collar the man was too well dressed to go out barefoot."

"As soon as the shops are open, I'll slip out and buy you a pair of shoes and stockings," said the doctor; "but for mercy's sake, man, keep quiet while I'm gone. I wouldn't have my wife know of your being in the house for worlds."

"I'll keep quiet enough," growled the coiner. "These togs are no great shakes; but I feel myself more like a Christian in 'em than I felt in that old sack; and, I say, doctor, you'll give me a trifle of money to set me going again, won't you?"

"Money!" exclaimed Martin Prestwitch. "Why, my good creature, I'm as poor as a church mouse!"

"Come, that won't do," said the coiner. "You doctors make no end of money, helping your patients out of this world. It's only fair you should spend a little on a patient that you've helped *into* the world."

The doctor again urged his poverty, but it was no use. His arguments, however reasonable, prevailed nothing against that direful visitant.

"It's no good humbugging, doctor," said the man. "I don't leave this house without a fi'-pun-note."

It did happen that Martin Prestwitch possessed the sum of seven pounds ten, amassed by what supreme efforts of economy he and his narrow household only could have told, and honestly set aside for the payment of the Christmas quarter's rent. To part with any of this would be like shedding his heart's blood; but he felt himself utterly unable to cope with this dreadful creature, whom he had given back to the living world; and if the coiner had asked him for his heart's blood instead of a five-pound note, it seemed to Martin Prestwitch that he must needs have given it.

So, after a longish parley, and a desperate endeavor to defend his treasure on the doctor's part, Martin Prestwitch stole upstairs once more in the dead night-time, and crept like a robber to his little hoard, from which he took the five-pound note demanded by his tormentor. He looked at a little Dutch clock in the kitchen before he went back to the dissecting-room—watch he had none—and saw that it wanted still a quarter to three o'clock. The long dismal winter's night was not half gone yet, and Dr. Prestwitch did not know how much more that resuscitated felon might ask of him before it was done. To think of going to bed was worse than idle; sleep or rest was an impossibility with that baleful creature upon the premises. Dr. Prestwitch seated himself by the fire opposite his visitor, and prepared to wait for morning with what patience he might.

Fed and clothed, the intruder was inclined to be social, and expanded considerably as the night wore on, favoring Dr. Prestwitch with numerous glimpses of his past history, exhibiting a career at once adventurous and felonious. Sense of right and wrong seemed altogether wanting to this creature, whose real name, he told the doctor, was Jonathan Blinker, but who had been known to fame by several aliases, the most familiar of which was Captain Flashman.

Day dawned at length—a dull gray winter's morning, the atmosphere heavy with unfallen snow, the bright white ground

looking even whiter than it was against the dense leaden sky. When the little Dutch clock in the kitchen struck seven, Martin Prestwitch turned the key of the dissecting-room door, and conjured Mr. Blinker to keep silence; and for one whole hour the two men sat without speaking, Mr. Blinker dozing by the expiring fire, the surgeon listening to Barbara Snaffles's movements as she bustled about, performing her morning duties. Then came the shrill small voices of the children, and then his wife's gentle tones inquiring for the doctor at the dissecting-room door.

"You don't mind being locked in here for half an hour or so, while I go and get those shoes and stockings, do you?" asked Martin of Mr. Blinker, in a whisper.

The coiner looked at him doubtfully

"You ain't going to sell me, are you?" he said. "You wouldn't go and peach upon a poor devil that you've brought back to life? You wouldn't let me swing a second time for the sake of the reward?"

"Do you take me for a scoundrel?" exclaimed Martin, with suppressed indignation.

"No, I don't, and I'll trust you," answered the other promptly.

So Dr. Prestwitch went out, and locked the door behind him, to secure his secret from the exploring eyes of Barbara Snaffles.

He had to answer his wife's remonstrances and tender upbraidings. How could he sit up all night, to the peril of his precious health? He told her that his studies had been especially interesting, and the night had slipped away unawares.

"What! didn't it seem long, Martin," she exclaimed, "all those hours down in that cold dreary room?"

"No, indeed, my love; I never was more comfortable," answered the doctor, with audacious mendacity.

"You eat a good supper, anyhow, sir," said the familiar Barbara. "Only think, mum; there isn't a morsel of yesterday's quartern, and the Dutch cheese is clean gone!"

Martin Prestwitch slunk off without attempting an answer to this accusation. He muttered something about seeing a patient in the next street, put on his hat, and went out.

It would not do to trifle with Mr. Blinker. The shops must be open by this time, and the coiner might be shod and dispatched. The doctor cheapened a pair of roomy second-hand shoes on a cobbler's stall, and bought a pair of comfortable worsted stockings, of the size which his anatomical eye taught him was likely to suit Mr. Blinker. The half-hour had scarcely expired when he turned the key in the dissecting-room door. The coiner was asleep, with his head reposing comfortably upon the operating-table.

The shoes and stockings were an admirable fit; and when Dr. Prestwitch had farther provided an old hat, Mr. Blinker presented a tolerably respectable appearance. There was still the question of disguise; but the doctor, after some little search in his surgery, found a pair of green spectacles, which made a considerable alteration in Jonathan Blinker's physiognomy. When these had been assumed, the doctor looked out, saw that the ground was clear, that no inquisitive Barbara or anxious wife was lurking in the shadow of an adjacent doorway, and then ushered Mr. Blinker into the court, rejoiced beyond all measure to be rid of him, even at the cost of a five-pound note and that excellent bottle-green coat.

On the threshold Mr. Blinker turned round.

"I shall give you a look-in soon, doctor, to tell you how I get on."

"O, don't, if you please," the surgeon cried piteously. "It would never do for you to come here. You see, my family look upon you in the light of a body, and I don't see how they are to be brought to regard you from any other point of view."

"I sha'n't come to see your family," replied Jonathan Blinker; "I shall come to see you."

With this awful threat he stalked away, looking gigantic in the narrow alley. The doctor closed the door with a groan, and went to the parlor, where the meagre breakfast was neatly

laid on the round table by the small bright fire, and where the anxious wife was ready to take alarm at Martin's haggard face.

But Mary Prestwitch's anxious looks were not half so embarrassing as the searching glances of Barbara Snaffles, who regarded the surgeon with a morbid curiosity, as a man who had just left an abnormal employment. She lingered in the room while he ate his breakfast, handing him his coffee-cup and hovering over his solitary egg.

"Is *it* there still?" she asked him in a stage whisper, while Mrs. Prestwitch was engaged with the three hungry children, the youngest of which was still dependent upon the maternal breast for the most primitive kind of nourishment.

"What do you mean by *it?*" Dr. Prestwitch asked impatiently.

"Him! The body."

"No, girl; it's gone."

"Gone? What! you've done with it already!"

"Yes."

"And they've fetched it away?"

"Yes, they've fetched it away."

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Barbara, with an injured air; "they must have been in a hurry. I thought I should have seen it this morning. I've seen a many in my time—drownded and otherwise—and I never missed one before. I make no doubt I shall dream of him."

"Dream of him? Nonsense, girl!"

"Not having seen him, I make no doubt I shall dream of him," said Barbara, with an air of conviction. "I never missed one before—not if it was three streets off and the family as it belonged to a'most strangers to me; and to have had one in the same house, and not seen him, seems right-down stupid-like."

"Good gracious me!" cried the doctor; "the girl is a perfect vampire!"

"Was it them two as brought him as fetched him away?" Miss Snaffles inquired curiously.

"Of course," answered the doctor.

"And are they going to bury him in Newgate?"

"I suppose so. There, Bab, go and mind your work, and don't worry me any more about the man. He's gone; that's enough for you."

Heartily did Martin Prestwitch wish that his visitor of last night had indeed been carried away to be safely interred within the prison-walls. That farewell threat of Jonathan Blinker's weighed heavy on his soul.

For the first time since he had lived in Little Bell-street, Dr. Prestwitch was behind-hand with his Christmas rent, to the bewilderment of his faithful wife, who had helped him to save the seven pounds ten so carefully scraped together against the landlord should claim his due.

"It's gone, Mary," the doctor said dismally, "or at least five pounds ten out of it. You see, my dear, I was obliged to part with it."

"But what for, Martin? What could you want five pounds ten for?—you, who never spend money?"

"Surgical instruments, my love; a man's first duty is to his profession."

And again Martin Prestwitch hated himself for having lied to the wife of his bosom.

The landlord was displeased but not implacable. Dr. Prestwitch was a careful tenant, and had shown himself an honest man; so, after grumbling a little, the landlord gave him a month's grace, and went his way.

Jonathan Blinker kept his promise. In the wintry gloaming a great hulking man in a bottle-green coat with a fur collar might have been often seen entering the doctor's surgery from the narrow side-alley, with a furtive surreptitious air. Here Dr. Prestwitch held converse with him, and was fain to provide some small sum of money against his coming. In time these donations took the form of a weekly allowance, and the accomplished Captain Flashman became a regular pensioner upon the

doctor. He always used the same argument when claiming this bounty—Dr. Prestwitch had revived him of his own volition, and was therefore bound to aliment him—to keep him "going," as the Captain called it.

Dr. Prestwitch submitted to this imposition with much bitterness of spirit, and many a groan breathed in the solitude of his surgery. He was a man of a gentle and somewhat timorous nature, and he felt himself unable to resist such a claimant; so week by week the struggling surgeon's brain was racked by the consideration of how he was to provide for Jonathan Blinker. Nor was it money only that his tormentor demanded from him. The ex-coiner was of a hungry temperament, and took it in bad part if there was not some trifling snack provided for him when he paid his weekly visit; whereby the surgeon was fain to have recourse to divers small stratagems in order to set aside the remains of a beefsteak-pie or to secure the bladebone of a shoulder of mutton for the refection of his oppressor. The devoted Barbara did not fail to note the disappearance of these viands, and to remark upon the fitfulness of her master's appetite.

For a long time this secret burden weighed Martin Prestwitch down to the dust. Life had been a hard struggle before, but it was infinitely harder now, when the small weekly scrapings which he might have saved were absorbed by the omnivorous Blinker. He woke sometimes in the dead of the night, startled from sleep by the memory of his tormentor, and lay broad awake for hours, brooding over his difficulties.

Mr. Blinker had taken care to impress upon him that the thing he had done was against the law, and that he was liable to some severe penalty for having assisted in the evasion of a condemned felon. Being too benevolent a man to betray his incubus, and not valorous enough to face the difficulties of the case, Dr. Prestwitch submitted to be imposed upon, and received his pensioner as meekly as if Jonathan Blinker had been a creditor armed with a righteous claim against him.

Things went on in this dismal manner for some time, and

then there came a gradual change for the better in the doctor's circumstances. Patients dropped in upon him or sent for him much oftener than of old Now it was a summons to attend the birth of some denizen of a slum in St. Giles, anon he was called to the deathbed of some ancient inhabitant of the Mint; sometimes he was sent for to repair the damages caused by a faction-fight in the purlieus of Field-lane, or to operate upon the fractured ribs of some muscular member of the dangerous classes in Bedfordbury. On all these occasions he found that he had been recommended by Jonathan Blinker, who had described him as a perfect master of surgery and physic; and on all these occasions Dr. Prestwitch had reason to suspect that his new clients belonged to the criminal classes. But patients are patients, and these people paid the doctor promptly and liberally when flush of money, and showed themselves honorable whenever he gave them credit. The juvenile population in these quarters was perpetually being increased; and the ladies being uniformly pleased with gentle Martin Prestwitch, one matron recommended him to another, until the gentleman who was usually described amongst them as "Blinker's doctor" found his practice was really picking up, and his financial position becoming easier.

There were still, however, those dreaded visits of Jonathan Blinker; and it seemed to Dr. Prestwitch as if his whole life was pervaded by that bulkly figure in the bottle-green coat, very shiny about the cuffs and elbows, and very mangy as to the fur collar, by this time. And yet he felt that, on the whole, he was bound to be grateful to his tormentor, for the ultimate result of the business had been advantageous to himself. He did even try to make some show of gratitude; while Jonathan on his part was positively affectionate to his benefactor, declaring himself ready to serve him in any manner, at the hazard of a second suspension *per col.* even.

"There's nothing I wouldn't do for you, doctor," he said. "I'd coin for you if I had a new set of tools, or the money to buy 'em. There!"

The doctor, of course, entreated him to dismiss all ideas of coining from his brain, and to set about leading an honest life; but on this Mr. Blinker would only shake his head dubiously, as not perceiving the relevancy of the proposition.

So things went on for nearly three years. The doctor's three small children had been recruited by an infantine brother, and now numbered four, with the possibility of a fifth looming in the distance. The doctor's practice was better, but it was not a good one, and could not by any means be called an aristocratic or even a genteel practice; nor had the doctor any prospect of being able to remove to a more fashionable locality than Little Bell-street. He could pay the butcher and the baker, however, and had no need to worry himself about his rent; and this to a man of such modest desires was enough for contentment.

Mr. Blinker had been his pensioner all this time, and Barbara Snaffles had become quite familiar with the weekly visitor in the bottle-green coat, dimly visible in the gloaming; for whatever the season of the year, Mr. Blinker came only in the twilight. She believed in him firmly as a patient in the corn-chandlery line—Dr. Prestwitch had told her he was a corn-chandler—afflicted with some chronic disease, and one of her master's most profitable customers.

The third year was closing in when the evening and hour of Mr. Blinker's accustomed visit came round without bringing that gentleman to little Bell-street. It was the first time he had failed to appear with Tuesday evening's dusk since the foundation of this institution, and Dr. Prestwitch passed the remainder of the evening in a state of almost feverish restlessness, with the ex-coiner's allowance in his pocket. Could anything have happened to Jonathan Blinker? Could it be that this infliction had come to a sudden end?

A second Tuesday came round, and again Mr. Blinker was missing; a third, and then a fourth, with the same result. Dr. Prestwitch felt a wild, half-guilty hope that he should never see Jonathan Blinker again. Yet he was somewhat sorry to think that evil had befallen the missing man, nevertheless; for the

surgeon was of a kindly disposition, and the creature had loved him.

Six weeks went by, and there were still no tidings of Mr. Blinker. The surgeon read the police news, expecting to see some record of calmity to his felonious acquaintance; but the scanty news-sheet of the day contained no information of the missing Jonathan. If he had suffered, he had suffered under some alias unknown to the doctor. At the end of the six weeks, and while Dr. Prestwitch's wonderment was yet at its height, there came a mysterious brown paper parcel, addressed to the doctor in a queer cramped hand that he had never seen before. It was a small oblong package, very carefully corded and sealed, yet in a somewhat clumsy manner; and it arrived in the evening, while Martin Prestwitch was enjoying a pleasant interval of repose in the bosom of his family.

The surgeon of Little Bell-street was not the recipient of many parcels. Gifts and offerings of friendship were not showered upon him, even at the most festive season. Christmas brought him no monster turkeys, the new year no costly frivolities for his children in the way of sugar-plums; and his little ones had grown out of infancy without so much as a sponsorial fork and spoon amongst the four of them. The advent of a parcel, therefore, was a sufficient cause for excitement in the small family circle. The loving little wife's bright eyes grew brighter with pleasure, the two elder children hustled each other at their father's knees in their eagerness to see the parcel opened; and Barbara Snaffles stood open-mouthed and open-eyed at her master's elbow.

The parcel felt very heavy—almost like plate, Dr. Prestwitch thought—and, O, what an acceptable gift a dozen or so of silver forks and spoons would have been in that humble household! He broke the seals and unfastened the cord with hands that were tremulous with excitement. Inside the brown paper there was a small deal box, roughly made, and with the lid nailed down. There was some work and some delay in raising the lid; but when it was lifted, Mary Prestwitch thought the sight she

beheld an all-sufficient reward for a hundred times as much trouble.

Comfortably reposing between two layers of cotton wool appeared a quantity of golden guineas, their yellow brightness pleasingly relieved by a background of crown pieces, fresh from the Mint.

"O Martin," cried the little woman, with clasped hands, "who can have sent us so much money? Thanks be to God, whoever it is!"

For a few moments, Dr. Prestwitch did indeed believe that some unknown benefactor had taken compassion upon his poverty, and that the glistening counters before him were genuine coin of the realm. Only for a few moments, and then the image of Jonathan Blinker arose before his dazzled eyes, and he felt assured that these bright reproductions of King George's image were the handiwork of the coiner.

He pushed away his wife's hand as she stretched it out to take one of the guineas.

"Don't excite yourself, Molly," he said gently. "It isn't real money. It's only some one playing off a practical joke upon me."

"Not real money? O Martin!" exclaimed the wife, with something like a sob.

"No, my love. They look very well, certainly, but there's not a genuine guinea amongst them; and if you or I were to try to pass one of them, it would be at the hazard of our necks."

"I wouldn't mind trying, though," said the reckless Barbara, "at Bartlemy Fair."

"Bab, I'm ashamed of you!" cried the doctor.

He took up one of the delusive coins between his finger and thumb, and felt the edges with the air of a man learned in metallurgy.

"Examine the milling, my dear," he said, handing the false guinea to his wife. "That is the test."

Mary Prestwitch burst out crying as she looked at the bright simulacrum. It was a bitter disappointment. Five minutes

ago she had fancied that a shower of riches had descended upon them; and now it seemed as if the thought of their poverty was a keener pang than it had ever been before.

"Are they really false, Martin?" she asked piteously.

"As false as any that ever a man was hung for coining," replied the doctor.

He had just come upon a scrap of paper that lurked at the bottom of the box—a brief scrawl from Jonathan Blinker.

"Honerd Sirr," wrote the felon, "I ave gott sum tooles and biggun wurk agen. I send a fu spessimints, wich may be yusefull. Thay wold parse in yr nayburode.—Yrs to comand, J. B."

Martin Prestwitch tossed this missive into the fire.

"O Martin, who is it that has played this wicked trick?" asked his wife; "and what was there in that note?"

"Nothing that I could make out, Molly. Don't fret, my darling. I don't suppose the person meant unkindly."

"Not mean unkindly! and to disappoint us like that! O Martin!"

The Christmas snow lay in the retired nooks and byways of the great city once more, and the doctor was fourteen years older than at the beginning of this story. But he still lived in Little Bell-street, and still worked very hard to provide for his wife and children. The fact was, he had so many of them, that his household expenses for the last fourteen years had been steadily on the increase. He did not grumble at this, however. He could ill have spared one of that merry band.

His circumstances had improved somewhat year by year, but never so much as to justify his removal to a more fashionable neighborhood. His patients belonged to the lower classes, and if he had left Little Bell-street he must have left his practice behind him. So a whole nose-gay of blooming flowers had grown up in that dingy old house, more or less under the dominion of Barbara Snaffles. "Old servants are such hard masters," says Charles Reade, and certainly Barbara ruled the doctor's household with a rod of iron.

There was a great commotion in the family this Christmas. The eldest girl, her mother's namesake Molly, was going to be married; going to be transplanted into a sphere of life much loftier than that in which her father and mother had their being, for she had been lucky enough to win the affections of a fashionable young doctor, whose father was a physician with a large West-end practice; a very proud and pompous gentleman, not a little disposed to consider that his only son was throwing himself away upon pretty Molly Prestwitch.

They were to be married upon the last day of the old year, and poor Molly had had hard work to prepare her simple wedding outfit, with the aid and counsel of Barbara Snaffles. Gentle little Mrs. Prestwitch was something of a cipher in the household, like most mild-tempered women whose lives are taken up with the rearing of children. She was content to look on and see the indefatigable Barbara manage for herself and her family, and it seemed to her that everything Mistress Snaffles did was wise.

On Christmas-day there was to be a great festival in Little Bell-street. Young Mr. Clemmory—Molly's intended—was to dine with his future father-in-law; and the great Dr. Clemmory himself, of Savile-row, had condescended to accept Martin Prestwitch's invitation to partake of his modest Christmas fare. The fare was to be by no means unworthy of the distinguished guest, however; for Barbara had been up to her eyes in preparations for the last week, and had cheapened one of the finest geese in Leadenhall-market for the feast, which, with a haunch of mutton, a boiled round of beef, and a veal-pie, the doctor and his wife agreed would make a very pretty little dinner. They were to dine at three in the afternoon—quite a patrician hour—but young Clemmory had informed them that his father never dined earlier; and as the appointed time drew near, Barbara's nervousness increased to a feverish intensity. She felt that her reputation as a cook and a manager was staked upon this task.

A little before three Dr. Clemmory and his son arrived, the

West-end physician a ponderous man, with a fat voice, a pow dered wig, a pair of handsome legs in black-silk stockings, and a gold-headed cane. The small wainscoted parlor seemed hardly capacious enough for such grand company; and Mrs. Prestwitch was quite fluttered by the importance of her guest.

It was nearly dinner-time, and they were all assembled in the parlor: Molly the younger radiant and blooming in a white-muslin frock, with a coral necklace round her slender throat; two younger girls, who looked like smaller repetitions of Molly; three boys, more or less in the hobbledehoy stage of existence, all in clean shirt-frills, but showing a little more bony wrist below their coat-cuffs than was in accordance with the reigning fashion—poor people's children grow so fast. It was on the stroke of three; Mrs. Prestwitch was wondering how the goose would turn out; whether the haunch of mutton would be roasted to that perfection of culinary art which such a man as Dr. Clemmory had a right to expect in any joint set before him; and whether Barbara would emerge triumphantly from the plum-pudding ordeal, and walk unscathed through the mince-pie furnace. The house was small, and the narrow entrance-hall had been odorous with dinner for the last hour or more.

Before the neighboring clocks began to strike the hour, there came a loud double-knock at Dr. Prestwitch's door. The surgeon and his wife started and stared at each other aghast. They had invited no other guest; and the advent of a dropper-in upon such an occasion would be an unmixed calamity. Every fork and spoon had been pressed into the service of the day, every inch of the dinner-table was engaged.

The West-end physician was laying down the law in his pompous voice, talking about the King, and my Lord North, and these contumacious Americans; but every other tongue was silent, and Dr. and Mrs. Prestwitch were straining their ears to the utmost to hear the opening of the street-door, and Barbara's parley with the unexpected visitor. There was a long pause: it was not an easy thing for Bab to leave her dinner

at the supreme moment of "dishing up," and it would have been ill-manners for a member of the family to leave the room in order to open the street-door. There was a prolonged pause therefore, during which the church clocks chimed three with a solemn sound, and the individual who had knocked gave a loud husky h'm, a sound that sent a cold shiver through Martin Prestwitch, he scarcely knew why.

At last the door was opened, and a voice that turned the surgeon's blood to ice was heard inquiring for Dr. Prestwitch. Then a pair of creaking shoes walked down the passage, the parlor-door was flung open, and Barbara announced Mr. JONATHAN BLINKER!

It was the coiner, dressed in a bran-new bottle-green coat and breeches, and a scarlet waistcoat elaborately adorned with gold lace; the coiner grown stout and red-faced and prosperous-looking; the coiner in a snow-white frilled-shirt, and with a new hat under his arm.

There was a dead silence. Martin Prestwitch's countenance assumed a sickly hue; the great man from Savile-row stopped suddenly in his lecture, and stared at the new-comer, as if waiting for an introduction. Mrs. Prestwitch and the children stared also; but were inclined to consider Mr. Blinker's jovial red face in a favorable aspect. He looked an eminently respectable gentleman of the agricultural class.

How d'ye do, doctor?" he said, unabashed by the assembly in which he found himself. "I've just come back from America, and I thought I'd give you a look up before I went anywheres else, even though it was Christmas-day; and I don't mind cutting my Christmas beef with you, if you've no objections."

What could Martin Prestwitch do—a weak soul at the best, and especially feeble where Jonathan Blinker was concerned? He faltered out a half-audible introduction, "Dr. Clemmory, Mr. Blinker; Mr. Clemmory, Mr. Blinker." The physician bowed with an urbane stateliness; good-natured George Clemmory shook hands with the stranger.

"Your arrival is somewhat of a coincidence," said Dr. Clemmory; "we were discussing the aspect of American affairs when you knocked."

Barbara announced dinner before Mr. Blinker could reply. By a rapid and judicious manœuvering of the knives and forks, she had contrived to prepare a cover for the uninvited guest; and the coiner took his place amongst the rest of the company to the horror of Martin Prestwitch, who knew not what revelations might be made before the meal was finished, and who felt that his face was palpably bedewed with cold perspiration.

The banquet was a success. Dr. Clemmory ate like an alderman, and praised the goose and the haunch until Barbara's countenance glowed with an honorable pride. Mr. Blinker made himself eminently agreeable, talking jovially with the youngsters at his end of the table, and leading the laughter for all Dr. Clemmory's jokes with a stentorian peal. It is true that he put his knife in his mouth a good deal, and supped up his gravy in a painfully audible manner; but people were not so refined in those days, and a prosperous agriculturist might do as much as this without creating a scandal. Altogether, things were much better than Martin Prestwitch had expected, and as the evening wore on he began to breathe more freely.

After dinner there was a dessert of nuts and oranges. How happy George Clemmory and pretty Molly Prestwitch seemed roasting chestnuts at the fire in the dimly-lighted parlor, with all those young brothers and sisters, while their parents conversed more gravely in the dining-room, where there was a steaming bowl of punch! Under the influence of punch, the West-end physician became wonderfully expansive, and patronized Jonathan Blinker in the most genial manner.

"I like a man of that stamp," he said afterwards in confidence to Martin Prestwitch; "an honest jovial fellow, cast in a good mould, sir, cast in a good mould. There's genuine metal there, Dr. Prestwitch; you can hear the ring of it. The man is sterling coin, sir."

Martin Prestwitch shivered, and could only reply with a sickly smile.

Before the night was out Dr. Clemmory was obviously the worse or the better for liquor, and had become almost maudlin in his expressions of regard for the ex-coiner. Mr. Blinker had drunk more, but the strong drink had no effect upon him. When the physician's coach came to fetch him away from Little Bell-street, he volunteered to set Mr. Blinker down at his inn before driving home; an offer which was accepted, to the horror of Martin Prestwitch.

If Dr. Clemmory had taken a fancy to Mr. Blinker, that worthy, on his part, had taken a fancy to the junior members of the Prestwitch family. He insisted upon kissing the three girls under the mistletoe when he wished them good-night, and wound up by kissing Barbara Snaffles in the passage. He squeezed Martin Prestwitch by the hand upon the threshold, and said in a confidential voice,

"I think you've been glad to see me, doctor; and I take it kindly. I've not forgot past favors. I've made a bit of money out yonder in the shipping line, and I've left every penny of it to you."

It was the truth; and the bit of money turned out to be a large fortune, which Dr. Prestwitch inherited three years afterwards from the grateful Blinker, who expired in the odor of sanctity at his own house at Clapton, sincerely regretted by the young Prestwitches, to whom he had been a kind of fairy godfather, showering benefits and gifts upon them during those concluding years of his life. To the last day of his existence Dr. Clemmory was wont to speak of Mr. Blinker as a model of probity, and the very flower of successful traders and self-made men.

COLONEL BENYON'S ENTANGLEMENT.

CHAPTER I.

"Thou see'st we are not all alone unhappy:
This wide and universal theatre
Presents more woful pageants than the scene
Wherein we play in."

IT was late in July when Herbert Benyon, colonel of a Bengal cavalry regiment, landed at Southampton from one of the P. and O. steamers, home from India on sick-leave. The Colonel had been very ill indeed with jungle fever; very close to the shadowy boundary which divides us from that unknown country whither we are all journeying with steady footsteps on the separate roads of life. The fresh sea-breezes and idle steamboat life had done a good deal for him, but he still bore the traces of that desperate sickness. The sunburnt face was wan and haggard, and there were lines of premature age about the mouth and dark shadows under the large lustrous gray eyes. Those eyes of Colonel Benyon's had been wont to strike terror to the souls of defaulting soldiers, conscious of a deficiency in the way of pipe-clay or a laxity as to drill; the gray seemed to change to black when the Colonel was angry, and at such times his men were apt to say that their commanding officer looked a very devil. He was not exactly a martinet either, and was known to be as particular about the comfort and well-being of his soldiers as he

was about their appearance on parade; but he was a hard master, and his men feared him.

The Colonel gave a sigh, which was the next thing to a groan as the express from Southampton slackened its pace at Waterloo. He had a first-class carriage all to himself, and had littered all the seats with an accumulation of newspapers, despatch-boxes, dressing bags, and such light luggage. He had flung himself about the narrow space, like some restless lion in its den, during that rapid journey; had taken up one newspaper after another, and tossed it aside again with an air of weariness nigh unto death. And now, at the end of his journey, during which he had seemed devoured by impatience, he groaned aloud from very heaviness of spirit.

He was nine-and-thirty years of age, something over six feet in height, broad-shouldered, strong-limbed, and, if not exactly handsome, at least distinguished-looking; his military career had been one continued success, and the men who knew him best prophesied for him distinction in the future. He had been eleven years away from England, and had passed through the fiery furnace of the Indian Mutiny, reaping a harvest of laurels from that most bloody field. And now he came home with two years' furlough, a handsome balance at his English bankers', and not a creature in the world with a claim upon his purse or his care.

A more thoroughly independent man than Herbert Benyon never landed upon British soil. He had escaped the rocks and shoals of matrimony by what his brother officers called a fluke. In plain words, he had been jilted at the outset of his career by a high-born and penniless flirt, who had thrown him over at the last moment in favor of a wealthier suitor. In all outward seeming he had borne his disappointment gayly enough; but from that hour he became as a man hewn out of granite in relation to all womanly fascinations. The prettiest girls in Calcutta, the most dangerous young matrons in the Indian military world, had flashed their brightest glances upon him with no more effect than the rising sun has nowadays on the head of Memnon. He

was one of the best waltzers in English India, and was wont to declare that waltzing was an intellectual exercise; but in all the giddy mazes of a dozen seasons, Colonel Benyon had never been known to entangle himself. There were women who were said to have been, in the graceful phraseology of the junior officers, "down any amount of a pit," or "up no end of a tree," on the subject of the Colonel; but the Colonel himself had never been known to smile upon a woman with anything warmer than the conventional smile demanded of him by society, since the hour when Lady Julia Dursay had written to tell him that she had looked into her own heart, and found that it was better for both of them that they should break an engagement which could never result in happiness to either.

He had taken life pleasantly enough withal, and was eminently popular among his brother officers: a great billiard-player, a most implacable and inscrutable opponent at the whist-table, and a mighty hunter of those larger animals which enliven the jungle by their existence. He had sent home innumerable tiger-claws mounted on silver, as labels for his English friends' decanters, and had more skins of wild beasts than he knew what to do with.

Indeed, Herbert Benyon excelled in all those accomplishments which win a man the respect of his fellow-men, and the admiration of the softer sex.

He was rich as well as successful. A bachelor-uncle had died during his absence in the East, leaving him a considerable fortune, and a fine old place in the north of Scotland. It would have seemed as if a man could scarcely desire more good things than had fallen to the lot of Herbert Benyon; and yet the man was not happy. Coming home to familiar scenes after those eleven years of exile, awoke no thrill of rapture in his heart. He had, perhaps, no enthusiastic affection for the country of his birth; in any case his return brought him no pleasure, only a gloomy sense of his own isolation.

Near relatives he had none: neither sister nor brother would smile a welcome upon him; his father and mother had been dead

twenty years. He had some distant kindred, of course—men and women who bore his name, and who professed a certain amount of affection for him; and he had friends by the score—the people to whom he had sent tiger-claws, and wonderful inlaid boxes lined with sandal-wood, and cashmere shawls, and em broidered muslins, and all those treasures of Ind wherewith the wanderer is wont to gratify his acquaintance; but that was all. Amongst all the men he knew there was only one to whose friendly smile and welcoming grasp of the hand he looked forward with any ray of real pleasure.

This was a man of about his own age, a comrade at Eton and Cambridge, a certain Frederick Hammersley, who had begun life as a country curate, and had been spoiled for the church by the inheritance of a comfortable fortune, and the development of views in which his diocesan, a bishop of evangelical tendencies, had recognized a leaning towards Romanism.

Mr. Hammersley had not gone over to Rome, however; he had contented himself with writing several theological pamphlets setting forth his principles, which were of the most advanced Anglican school, and with doing much good in his immediate neighborhood. If he were no longer an accredited shepherd, he had not fogotten the divine precept, "Feed my sheep."

The last that Colonel Benyon had heard of this friend was the announcement of his marriage. They did not maintain friendship by an interchange of long letters, like a couple of schoolgirls. Each in his way was fully occupied by the business of life; and each felt secure of the other's friendship. There was no need of pen-and-ink protestations between men of this stamp.

Yes, there was some pleasure for the Colonel in the thought of meeting Fred Hammersley. He deposited his goods and chattels at the British, in Cockspur-street, and went straight to his friend's club, the respectable Athenæum. The London season was over, and passers-by stared a little at the Colonel's tall figure, with its unmistakable military air. There were some changes in the aspect of things even at this end of the town since those days before the Indian Mutiny, but the Colonel did

not take the trouble to notice them; the Corinthian pillars of a renovated club-house, or a new shop-front here and there, seemed trivial objects to a man fresh from the natural splendors of Cashmere; or it may be that Herbert Benyon was uninterested in these things for lack of any personal association that went home to his heart. When he came to the Athenæum, where he had eaten many a pleasant dinner with his old friend, the familiar look of the hall stirred something in his breast that was almost emotion.

He was doomed to encounter a disappointment here. "Mr. Hammersley was abroad," the porter told him, "on the Continent." The porter could not tell where; but he had been absent for a long time; ever since—ever since—last spring was a twelvemonth," the porter said, pulling himself up, as if he had been about to say something else.

"And his letters," asked the Colonel—"what becomes of them?"

"We don't get many," answered the man; "but any that do come here for him are sent to Coutts's. He's always on the move, they say, and nobody but his bankers knows where to find him."

There was something in the man's face that impressed Colonel Benyon with the idea that he could say more if he pleased. He lingered on the threshold of the stranger's room with a dubious meditative air, and slipped half a sovereign into the porter's hand, almost as if from pure absence of mind.

"Thank you, sir; you're very kind, sir. I'm sure I'm sorry enough Mr. Hammersley has left us. It was always a pleasure to do anything for him. Not that he ever gave any trouble—wanting hansoms fetched when it's raining cats and dogs, or anything of that kind. He was always quiet in his ways and affable in his manners. I wish there was more like him. And it do seem a hard thing that he should have to turn his back upon his country like that."

The Colonel stared at the speaker.

"But he travels for his own pleasure, I suppose?" he ex-

claimed. "He had no particular reason for leaving England?"

"Well, yes, sir; there was unpleasant circumstances connected with his going away. Of course, at the West end those things get talked of, and a person in my position can't shut his ears to such reports. I should be the last in the world to talk, but there's nothing going that don't come to my hearing somehow."

Colonel Benyon stood aghast. What did it mean? Had Frederick Hammersley, that most conscientious and devoted of Anglicans, committed forgery? What was the meaning of this enforced exile? Then a light suddenly flashed on the Colonel's mind.

"His wife is with him, I suppose?" he said interrogatively.

"No, sir; Mrs. Hammersley is not with her husband. In fact, his going abroad arose from circumstances connected with that party. She turned out a bad lot, sir. I should be the last to speak disrespectuously of a lady, and of a lady connected with ourselves, as I may say; but I have heard our gentlemen say that Mrs. Hammersley's conduct was very bad."

"She left him, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir; ran away from him, after they'd been married little better than six months, with a gentleman they say she was engaged to before she kept company with Mr. Hammersley. The marriage was her father's doing, so I've heard; and when this gentleman, who was a captain in the army, came home from India, she ran away with him. They went to Orstend and such-like places together, and two months afterwards the captain was found dead early one September morning, shot through the heart, on the sands at Blankenburg. There was a great piece of work. Every one thought it was a duel, and that Mr. Hammersley had killed him; but he was supposed to be in London at the time, no one had seen him or heard of him in Belgium, and they never tried to bring it home to him. The matter dropped after a little while. Mr. Hammersley got a

divorce soon after, and left England directly his case was decided."

"And what become of the lady?" asked the Colonel, curious to know the fate of a creature so lost.

"I've never heard, sir. She made no defence in the Divorce Court. It would go rather hard with her, I should think, the captain being dead, unless her friends took her back, which don't seem likely."

"Poor wretch! Do you remember the man's name?"

"What, the captain, sir? I've heard it times and often. He was a Junior-United gentleman. Let me see—was it Chandos? No. Champney—Captain Champney."

Colonel Benyon remembered the name, but not the man; he was in a line regiment, altogether an obscure person compared with the dashing colonel of Bengal cavalry. He had not even heard of the scandal connected with the poor fellow's death. He had never been an eager devourer of English newspapers, unless they had some bearing on the politics of martial India; so whatever mention there had been of Champney's death and Hammersley's divorce had escaped him.

He left the Athenæum and strolled into his own club, the Senior United Service, very much cast down. He ordered his dinner; it was growing dusk by this time, and the coffee-room had an empty and even sepulchral look, with lamps glimmering here and there in the twilight, like the religious gloom of some Egyptian temple. Modern architects have a knack of giving an air of Carthage or Babylon to their public dining-rooms.

After dinner the Colonel wrote to his old friend an honest straightforward epistle, touching lightly upon Frederick Hammersley's trouble, but withal full of manly sympathy; not such a flowery missive as the Orestes of a French novel would have addressed to his Pylades under the like circumstances, but a thorough English letter. If Hammersley were within any accessible distance, the Colonel proposed to join him as soon as he was strong enough for the journey.

"I am on leave for my health, and for that alone," he wrote,

"and I do not see why I should not get well as fast, or perhaps faster abroad than I should in England. I have scarcely an association in this country that I care to renew. I am not even eager to visit that stern old Scottish barrack where you and I once hunted the Caledonian boar or stag, in an autumnal holiday, and which now belongs to me. In short, I have outlived most of the illusions of life, and have nothing left, save a belief in friendship where you are concerned. Let me come, my dear Hammersley, unless solitude is your fixed humor; but do not say yes if inclination says no."

Colonel Benyon addressed this letter to his friend under cover to Messrs. Coutts; and having done this, he felt almost as if he had no more to do until the wanderer's reply came. The waiters at the United Service told him that London was empty —in a fashionable sense, a veritable desert. Yet no doubt there were people he knew to be found in the great city, and there were theatres enough open for his amusement had he cared to visit them; but he had lost his relish for the modern drama fifteen years before, so he went home to the British, read the papers, and drank the weakest decoction of soda-and-brandy until an hour or so after midnight.

He had a little business to transact with his army agent next day, and an interview with a stockbroker in Wanford-court, to whom he entrusted the investment of those moneys which had accumulated during his absence. On the day after, he made a round of calls at the houses of his old acquaintances; and had reason to acknowledge the truth of the waiter's assertion as to the barrenness of civilized London. Every one best worth seeing was away. There were two or three business men, who professed themselves the most miserable drudges in the great mill which is always grinding everything into money; here and there in that obscurer region beyond Eaton-square he found a homely matron who lamented her inability to take the dear children to the seaside until Edwin or Augustus should be able to leave that tiresome office in the city, and who seemed unaffectedly rejoiced to see the Colonel; but the choicer spirits

among his old circle—the *dessus du panier*—were away yachting off Cowes, or gambling in Germany. Altogether the day was a dreary one. Colonel Benyon was glad to return to the solitude of his hotel, and the intellectual refreshment of the evening papers. After this he idled away a week in revisiting such familiar haunts of his early manhood as he cared to see again. The contemplation of them gave him very little pleasure; that one brief letter of Julia Dursay's seemed to have taken all the sunshine out of his nature. There was a settled bitterness in his mind—a sense that outside his profession there was nothing in the world worth living for.

Nearly a fortnight went by before there came any answer from Mr. Hammersley; and the Colonel felt that he could shape no plan for his holiday till he received his friend's reply. The letter came at last—a letter that went to Herbert Benyon's heart; for it told him in a few words how dire a deathblow had shattered his friend's life.

"No, my dear Benyon," wrote the exile, whose letter was dated from a small town in Norway, "you must not join me. The day may come, God only knows when, in which I may be fitter for a friend's companionship; but at present I am too miserable a creature to inflict my society upon any one I care for. I have been roughing it in this country for the last six months, and like the fishing, the primitive life, and simple, friendly people; but I doubt if such an existence in such a climate as this would suit an Anglo-Indian valetudinarian, even supposing I were decent company. I write in all candor, you see, my near Benyon, and I do not think you will doubt my regard for you because, under the bitter influence of an affliction which happily few men can measure, I shrink even from your companionship.

"And now I have a proposition to make to you. You are home on sick-leave, you tell me, and really in need of perfect rest. I have a house in the extreme west of Cornwall—a cottage in a garden of roses, within sight of the sea, which I think would suit you to a nicety, if I can persuade you to make

your home there for the next few months. The place is full of bitter associations for me, and I doubt if there is another living creature to whom I would offer it; but I shall be heartily glad if you will inhabit a spot that was once very dear to me. The climate is almost equal to Madeira; and if you have any inclination left for that kind of thing, there is plenty of shooting and hunting to be had in the neighborhood. I have a couple of old servants in charge of the place, to whom I shall write by this post, telling them to hold themselves ready for your reception; so you will have nothing to do but put yourself into the train at Paddington any morning you please, and go straight through to Penjudah, from which station a seven-mile drive will carry you to Trewardell, by which barbarous name my place is known. If you would drop a line to Andrew Johns, Trewardell, near Penjudah, beforehand, to announce your coming, he would meet you at the station with a dog-cart. There are a couple of good hacks in the stable, and a hunter I used to ride two years ago, which is, I fancy, about up to your weight."

The offer was a tempting one, and after some hesitation the Colonel decided upon accepting it. Cornwall was a new country to him—a remote semi-barbarous land, he fancied, still pervaded by the Phœnicians and King Arthur; a land that had been more civilized two thousand years ago than to-day; a land with which Solomon had had trading relations in the way of metal; a land where, at some unknown period, the children of Israel had worked as slaves in the mines; a land of which one might believe anything and everything, in fact. There was some smack of adventure in the idea of going to take possession of his absent friend's house, some faint flavor of romance in the whole business. It would be dull, of course; but the Colonel liked solitude, and found himself year by year less inclined for the kind of life most people consider pleasant. He might have spent his autumn in half-a-dozen fine old country-houses, and received unlimited petting from their fair inhabitants, if he

had desired that kind of thing; but he did not. He only wanted to recover his old health and vigor, and then go back to India.

He wrote to Mr. Andrew Johns, informing that worthy of the probable time of his arrival; and three days afterwards turned his back upon the great city, and sped away westwards across the fields, where the newly-cut stubble was still bright and yellow, onward through a region where the land was red, then away skirting the edge of the bright blue water, across Isambard Brunel's wonderful bridge at Saltash, and then along a narrow line that flies over deep gorges in the woodland, through a fair and lonely landscape to the little station of Penjudah.

It was dusk in the late summer evening when the traveller heard the barbarous name of the place called out with the unfamiliar Cornish accent by a stalwart Cornish porter. The train, which had been about a quarter of a mile long when it left Paddington, had dwindled to a few carriages, and those were for the most part empty. Penjudah seemed the very end of the world. The perfect quiet of the place almost startled the Colonel as he stood upon the platform, looking round about him in the faint gray evening light. He found himself deep in the heart of a wooded valley, with no sign of human life within sight except the two officials who made up the staff of Penjudah station. There was a balmy odor of pines, and a subdued rustle of leaves lightly stirred by the warm west wind. Among the Indian hills he could scarcely remember a scene more lonely. A rabbit ran down a wooded bank and scudded across the line while he was looking about him. The guard told him afterwards that scores of these vermin might be seen playing about the line at odd times. The trains were not frequent enough to scare them.

Outside the station the Colonel found an elderly man-servant, out of livery, with a smart dog-cart and a capital horse.

This was Andrew Johns. He handed the reins to the traveller, and took his seat behind in charge of Colonel Benyon's portmanteaus; and a few minutes afterwards the Colonel was

driving up a hilly road that wound across the twilit woods. That seven miles' drive to Trewardell was all up and down hill. The Colonel had rarely encountered a stiffer road even in the East, but the landscape, dimly seen in that dubious light, seemed to him very beautiful; and he was glad that he had accepted his friend's offer. From the top of one of the hills he caught a glimpse of the distant sea; on the summit of another there was a stretch of common-land, and a tall obelisk that served as a beacon for all the countryside, a monumental tribute to a great Indian soldier.

Something over half an hour brought them into a valley, where there was a church with a square tower surmounted with stone pinnacles, a church of some pretension for a parish which consisted of about half-a-dozen houses. Close to the church were the gates of Trewardell. They stood open to receive the stranger; and after a winding drive through a shrubbery, the Colonel saw the lighted windows of a long low white-walled cottage half smothered in foliage and flowers.

Mrs. Johns and a fat-faced housemaid were waiting in the hall, and a male hanger-on in corduroy and a stable-jacket was in attendance to receive the horse. Everything within looked bright and homelike; one might have fancied the house in full occupation. The hall was low and wide, with panelled walls painted white, and hung with water-colored sketches prettily framed. The dining-room was a comfortable square apartment, with light oak furniture of the modern mediæval order, and dark-blue silk hangings. The drawing-room opened out of it, and was more of a boudoir or lady's morning room than an actual drawing-room. Everywhere, in the dining-room, and even in the entrance-hall, there were books, from ponderous folios (choice editions on elephant-paper) to the daintiest duodecimos in white-vellum binding. There was a brightness and prettiness about everything which the Colonel never remembered to have noticed in any house before. It looked like a home that had been made beautiful by the hands of a lover preparing a bower for his bride.

"A woman must have been hard to please who could not make herself happy here, and with so good a fellow as Fred Hammersley," he said to himself.

An excellent dinner had been prepared for him, at which repast the versatile Mr. Johns waited, and proved himself an admirable butler. The Colonel asked him a good many questions about the neighborhood in the course of the meal, to all of which Mr. Johns replied with considerable intelligence; but he uttered no word about his absent master, or of the kind of existence that he had led there in the brief period of his wedded life.

It was ten o'clock when Colonel Benyon had finished dinner, a warm moonlit night; so he went out to explore the gardens and enjoy his evening smoke. It might be very long before any feminine presence would lend its grace to those bright-looking rooms; but Herbert Benyon would as soon have thought of committing sacrilege as of desecrating his friend's house with the odor of tobacco. A woman had left the impress of her individuality upon everything. Those water-colored sketches in the hall were signed by a woman's hand; in the drawing-room there were caskets and writing-cases, work-baskets and photographic albums—innumerable trifles that were unmistakably a woman's belongings. It seemed as if everything had been religiously preserved exactly as the traitress had left it. Colonel Benyon could fancy her last look round this room, or fancied that he could fancy it. There was a low arm-chair on one side of the fire-place, with a gem of a work-table beside it—her seat, of course. How often had she sat there meditating treason, with her husband sitting opposite to her perhaps, watching her fondly all the while, and thanking God for having given him so sweet a wife!

"Confound the woman!" muttered the Colonel impatiently; "I can't get her out of my mind."

It did indeed seem to him to-night as if that false wife had left an evil influence upon the scene of her iniquity. He could not feel at ease in the house; he could not help wondering and speculating about that lost creature.

"Where is she now?" he asked himself; and then there arose before him an image of her sitting alone in some sordid continental lodging, poor, friendless, desolate; or worse, flaunting on a Parisian boulevard in the livery of sin. Do what he would, he could not help thinking of her.

"It will wear off in time, I suppose," he said to himself; "but upon my word, if I were her husband, I could scarcely worry myself more about her."

He went out into the gardens, and roamed about amongst the flower-beds, and in the darksome shrubbery-paths, smoking and communing with himself for more than an hour. The grounds of Trewardell were spacious and lovely, quite out of proportion with the humble pretensions of the house. There was a lake on one side of the lawn, on the other a group of fine old plane-trees; beyond these a short avenue of elms leading to a meadow that looked almost a park. The soft night air was heavy with the perfume of myrtle and magnolia.

"The place is a perfect Eden," said the Colonel; "but I wish I had not been told the history of Eve and the Serpent."

CHAPTER II.

"Name her not now, sir; she's a deadly theme."

For the first fortnight of his sojourn at Trewardell, Colonel Benyon's Cornish experiences were altogether agreeable. The weather was brilliant; and in a country much given to moisture he was not inconvenienced by a single shower. There was plenty for him to see within a day's ride: here a ruined castle, there a nobleman's seat renowned amongst the show places of the west; and during those first two weeks the Colonel spent the greater part of every day in the saddle; or on foot tramping over sunburnt hills high above a broad sweep of sea, while his horse rested at some solitary rustic inn. He was somewhat inclined to forget how short a time had gone by since he was lying in his Indian bungalow, well-nigh given over by the regimental doctors. Perhaps in that first fortnight of genuine

enjoyment he sowed the seeds of a mischief which was to overtake him by and by. The third week brought him into September, and he had a good time of it among the partridges, with Andrew Johns for his guide and counsellor. For three consecutive mornings the two men set out at daybreak when the dew was heavy upon the ground, and tramped over miles of stubble and turnip-field before breakfast. On the fourth day the Colonel suddenly knocked under, and told Mr. Johns that he had had enough, just for the present. Partridge-shooting was all very well in its way; but there were shooting-pains in the Colonel's limbs, and a dull perpetual aching in the Colonel's shoulders, which a man of forty rarely cares to cultivate. There was a drizzling rain, too, upon that fourth day of September; and Colonel Benyon was very glad to find a blazing fire in the bright-looking drawing-room, wherein he had a knack of painting imaginary scenes—scenes out of that tragical drama in which Flora Hammersley had been the heroine.

In his enforced idleness to-day, the thought of his friend's sorrow, and this woman's sin, haunted him more vividly than ever. That young soldier lying dead in the chill autumn sunrise on the sands near Blankenburg, slain by a hand that had never before been lifted to do a cruel thing—the hand of a generous single-minded man. As to the fact of Fred Hammersley's share in this transaction, Colonel Benyon felt no doubt. His friend had killed the seducer. It was the thing he would have done himself, unhesitatingly, under like circumstances. He walked up and down the room. He had read yesterday's *Times* and *Globe*, *Standard*, and *Telegraph*, and there was no more mental pabulum for him till a post came in—per special messenger on pony from the nearest post-town—at five o'clock P.M. At another time Mr. Hammersley's splendid library might have afforded him ample entertainment; but to-day he was in no humor for books; he had opened half-a-dozen or so, and after skimming a page or two absently, had put each volume back on its particular shelf. He could not fasten his mind upon any subject.

The rain came down in a monotonous hopeless way; even the standard roses on the lawn outside had a dreary look. The Colonel longed, like Horace Walpole, to bring them indoors and put them by the fire. Sometimes Colonel Benyon stood staring out at the deluged garden; sometimes he threw himself into a low arm-chair by the fire, and amused himself by a savage demolition of the coals; anon he paced the room again, pausing now and then, in an idle way, to examine some one of those womanly trifles whose presence reminded him of the lost mistress of Trewardell.

The day seemed interminable. He was glad when it grew dark; still more glad of the slight distraction afforded by his seven o'clock dinner, though he had no appetite—an utter distaste for food, indeed—and a burning thirst.

"I feel very much as I used to feel at the beginning of my fever," he said to himself, a little alarmed by these symptoms, and by the heaviness and aching of his limbs. "God forbid that I should have another spell of it!"

Andrew Johns had gone to the market-town on business connected with the victualling of the small household; and Mrs. Johns had put on a black-silk gown and her best cap to wait upon the Colonel, not caring to trust that delicate office to the fat-faced rustic handmaiden.

"The girls we get hereabouts are so rough," she said; "and this one has never been used to much out of the dairy. We had a houseful of servants when Mr. Hammersley lived here; but since he's gone abroad there's been scarcely enough work for me and a girl."

The dame gave a profound sigh. Colonel Benyon perceived that she was garrulously given, and perceived that if he had a mind to hear about his friend's history in this house, it would not require any great effort to set Mrs. Johns discoursing thereupon.

"Do try one of those red mullet, sir; I dressed them with my own hands. It's a sauce that Mr. Hammersley was fond of—poor dear gentleman!"

Here came another profound sigh; and the dame lingered, trifling absently with the arrangements of the sideboard, as if willing to be questioned.

"You seem to have been very fond of your master," said the Colonel.

"We shouldn't be much account if we weren't fond of him," replied Mrs. Johns. "He was as good a master as ever lived. We'd known him from a boy, too. He used to come down to Penrose Abbey for his holidays in the old Squire's time—Mr. Penrose: you've heard tell of him, I dare say, sir. Andrew and me were butler and cook at Penrose for twenty years. Mr. Hammersley was only a distant relation to the Squire, you see, sir, and nobody thought that he'd come in for all the property; but he did. I suppose Mr. Penrose took a fancy to him when he was a boy; but there were plenty more young nephews and cousins on the look-out for his money, I can tell you."

"Did Mr. Penrose ever live here?"

"No, sir, Trewardell was his mother's place, and it was shut up after her death. But since Mr. Hammersley came into the estate, the abbey has been kept as a show house. He didn't care to live there; it was cold and gloomy, he said; and he took a fancy to this place, and had it done up against his marriage—a power of money he spent upon it, to be sure. But dear me, sir, you haven't eat a mouthful of that mullet. Perhaps you don't like the sauce?"

"It's excellent, my dear Mrs. Johns, but I really have no appetite this evening."

"And there's a boiled fowl with stewed artichokes, and a brace of those birds you shot the day before yesterday. I hope you'll eat something, sir."

"I am sorry to do injustice to such good cooking; but upon my word I can't eat a morsel. If you'll make me a stiffish glass of brandy-and-water, as hot as you can make it, I think perhaps it might do me some good. I had a bad fever in India, and seem to have a touch of my old enemy to-night."

"Wouldn't you like Andrew to ride back for the doctor, a

soon as he comes in? or I could send one of the men at once, sir."

"On no account. Pray don't make an invalid of me. I walked a little too far after the partridges yesterday; I daresay I've knocked myself up, that's all. Even if I should feel worse, which I don't expect, I've some medicine in my dressing-case."

Mrs. Johns mixed the brandy-and-water with an anxious face, and watched the Colonel while he drank it. Then she persuaded him to return to the drawing-room, where she ensconced him luxuriously in an easy chair by the fire, with a tiger-skin carriage-rug over his knees.

"Don't hurry away, Mrs. Johns," he said, after duly acknowledging her attention. "I like to hear you talk of my poor friend Hammersley; sit down by the fire, do, there's a good soul. That's right; it looks quite comfortable and homelike to see you sitting there. I could almost fancy I'd discovered some treasure in the way of an aunt. I can't tell you how dreary I've felt all day. My mind has been running perpetually upon poor Hammersley and his wife. It's no use speaking of them to your husband; if I do, he tightens up his lips in a most impenetrable way, and is dumb immediately."

"Yes, sir, that's just like Andrew," replied the dame, smoothing her white-muslin apron and settling herself comfortably in the chair opposite the Colonel's; "I think he'd lie down on the ground for his master to walk over him; but you can never get him to talk about him, nor of her either, poor soul!"

"She behaved so badly, and worked such ruin, that I almost wonder you can find it in your heart to pity her," said the Colonel.

The good woman sighed again, and shook her head dubiously.

"You see I knew her, sir," she replied; "and it isn't likely I could bring myself to think as hardly of her as the rest of the world. She was such a noble, generous creature, no one could ever have thought she would do such a wicked thing. She hadn't been here very long before I found out that the love was all on one side in that marriage. She was very gentle and

winning in all her ways towards her husband; but she didn't care for him, and never had cared for him, and never would; that was plain enough to me. And she wasn't happy; do what he would to please her, he couldn't make her happy. There was a look in her face of missing something—a sort of blank look; and whenever her husband was away—though goodness knows that was not often—she would roam about the house in a restless way that gave one the dismals only to watch her."

"Did he see that she was unhappy, do you think?" asked the Colonel.

"No, sir, I don't think he did; and that's why it came upon him like a thunder-clap when she ran away. He was so bent upon making her happy, that I think he believed she was so. He was so proud of her too. Everybody admired her. She was the loveliest woman in the county, they said, though the west is famous for pretty women; and she was so clever—such a sweet singer. It was she who painted all the pictures in this room and in the hall. It was Mr. Hammersley's fancy to have none but what she had painted."

"Did she belong to this part of the country?"

"O dear no, sir. Her family were Suffolk people I've heard say; her father was a colonel in the Indian army, and there was a very large family of them—not too well off, I believe; so of course it was a very good match for her. I suppose she married to please her friends; such things seem common enough nowadays. She was always very sweetspoken and affable with me. One day when I was talking to her of a son of mine—my only child that died young—she said, 'Ah, Mrs. Johns, I have my dead too!' and I fancied she was speaking of some sweetheart very like that she'd had in time past."

"Did Captain Champney come here as Hammersley's friend?"

"No sir; he never came to this house at all; she must have met him out of doors. It was summer-time, midsummer, and very sultry weather. Mr. Hammersley was up in London on business connected with his estate. He was to be away a week at most, and he had wanted her to go with him; but she

wouldn't, not being over well or strong at the time. She'd had a low nervous fever in the spring, that had pulled her down a good deal. It was the morning after her husband left—I remember it all as well as if it was yesterday—she had been out in the village and round about the lanes visiting the poor—she was a rare hand at that always—and she came in at one of those windows while I was dusting the china in this room. I never shall forget her. Her face was as white as a sheet, and she walked in a strange tottering way, with her eyes fixed, until she came right up against me. Then she gave a start, and dropped into the nearest chair, half fainting. I brought her a glass of water, and asked her what had happened. 'O Mrs. Johns, she said, 'I'v seen a ghost!' I couldn't get her to say more than this; all the rest of the day she was shut up in her room. The next day there came a messenger with a letter for her, and late in the afternoon the same man came again with another letter. They were both from the Captain, of course; but all that day she never stirred outside the doors, not so much as to go into the gardens, though it was a splendid summer day. Early the next morning there came another letter, and in the afternoon she went out. She wore her garden-hat and a light muslin dress, and she took nothing with her. I could lay my life that when she left the house that afternoon she had no thought of going away; but she never came back."

"Were the two seen together in this neighborhood?"

"Yes; a lad met Mrs. Hammersley and a strange gentleman in Farmer Goldman's field—there's a short cut across that way to the Penjudah-road—she had her hands clasped over her face, and was sobbing as if her heart would break, the boy said, and the gentleman was talking to her very earnestly. The boy turned and watched them. They loitered about, talking for half an hour or so, Mrs. Hammersley crying almost all the time; and then the boy saw them get into a close carriage that had been waiting in the Penjudah-road, and heard the gentleman tell the man to drive to the station. This was about four o'clock in the afternoon, and the Plymouth train leaves Penjudah at a

quarter to five. It came out afterwards that Captain Champney had been staying at the Rose and Crown at Penjudah, and had hired a close fly on that day. The driver could tell all the rest —how he had waited above an hour in the road near Trewardell and picked up a lady there."

"How soon did Hammersley learn what had happened?"

"My husband telegraphed to him that night, and he was back early the next evening. He was very quiet. I never saw any one take a great blow so quietly. He didn't bluster or rave, as some gentlemen would have done; but he sat in the library for one whole day writing letters and seeing every one who had anything to tell him, while Andrew was about making inquiries quietly in every direction. There was no fuss or talk, considering, and it was only a few people knew anything of what had happened. As soon as Mr. Hammersley had heard all he could hear in this place, he started off—after those two, I suppose; and that's the last we ever saw of him. He wrote to Andrew soon after, telling him how the house was to be kept up, and so on; and that was all."

"You heard of Captain Champney's death, I suppose?" said the Colonel.

"Yes," Mrs. Johns replied, with a doubtful air, "we did hear that he was dead."

"And you heard the strange manner of his death, no doubt?"

"We saw something in the papers, but didn't take much heed of it," replied Mrs. Johns, with an air of not caring to pursue this subject.

The Colonel did not press it. There was no doubt in his own mind as to the hand that had slain Champney, and he fancied that Mrs. Johns shared his conviction upon that subject.

"Have you ever heard what became of Mrs. Hammersley?" he asked presently.

"Not a word, sir. That's what makes me pity her sometimes, in spite of myself. It's a hard thing for her to be left like that, without a soul to care for her—him that she sinned for dead and gone. She may be starving somewhere, poor misguided

creature! without a roof to cover her perhaps, and these empty rooms looking as if they were waiting for her all the while, with all the pretty things she was so fond of just as she left them. It always gives me the heart-ache to think of her, or to touch any of the things that belonged to her."

"Was it Hammersley's wish that the place should be kept just as she left it?"

"Yes, sir, that was one of his orders in the letter of instruction that he wrote to my husband before he left England."

"Is there no portrait of her about the house?"

"No, sir. There was a likeness of her, painted by some great artist in London, but I never saw that after the day when Mr. Hammersley came back and found her gone. Whether he destroyed it in secret that day, or put it away somewhere under lock and key, I can't tell. I only know that when I came into this room next morning the picture was gone. There's the blank space where it hung just above your head."

The Colonel looked up. Yes, there was the empty panel. On the opposite side of the fireplace was a portrait of his friend, little more than a head, against a dark background, bold and truthful, by the hand of John Philip. He had made a shrewd guess why the companion picture was missing.

He had been so much interested in the housekeeper's talk as almost to forget his pain and weariness; but by this time the stimulating effect of his dose of brandy-and-water had worn off, and he felt really ill, quite as ill as when the first warning of his fever came upon him up the country.

"I'm afraid I'm in for it, Mrs. Johns," he said, with a faint groan; "I'm afraid I'm going to be very ill. Rather hard upon you and your husband, isn't it, and not in the bond? My friend lent me his house to get well in; he didn't bargain for my falling ill in it."

Mrs. Johns did her best to console and cheer him with assurances that his symptoms indicated nothing more than a cold and a little over-fatigue.

"A cold's a hazardous thing for a man in my condition, my

good soul," said the Colonel, "and I was a fool to overdo it with those long tramps over the damp stubble. The doctor who sent me home gave me all manner of solemn warnings as to what I might and might not do, and I'm afraid I've paid very little attention to any of them. However, I'll go to bed at once, take a dose of the fellow's medicine, and wrap myself in a blanket. Perhaps I may be all right in the morning. But if I should be worse, you'd better telegraph to Plymouth for one of the best medical men there. Don't put me in the hands of a local doctor."

Mrs. Johns promised to obey these instructions, still protesting that the Colonel would be better in the morning, and then hurried off to see that there was a blazing fire made in his bedroom, and to provide one of her thickest blankets in which to envelop him.

CHAPTER III.

"Ah, homeless as the leaf that winds have blown
To earth—in this wide world I stand alone."

THE Colonel's dismal prophecy was but too faithfully realized. The next morning found him in a raging fever, with a furred tongue, bloodshot eyes, a galloping pulse, and racking pains in his limbs. It was no case of infection, no village epidemic. The Colonel had simply, in his own language, overdone it.

Mrs. Johns opined that this was the beginning of a rheumatic fever; but she still kept up her cheery tone to the patient, looking anxiously all the while for the advent of the Plymouth doctor.

He did not come till sunset, by which time the Colonel was worse. After making a careful examination of his patient, and questioning Mrs. Johns closely as to the Colonel's antecedents, the physician sat down to write a prescription.

"It is not so much a question of physic as of care," he said. "You have not called in any one from the neighborhood yet, I suppose?"

"No, sir. Colonel Benyon begged me not to call in any one of that kind, or I should have sent at once for Mr. Borlase."

"Never mind what the Colonel says. Let your husband call for Mr. Borlase, and get this prescription made up. He can ask Mr. Borlase to come back with him and see me. Or, let me see, there'll scarcely be time enough for that. I can call on Borlase as I drive back to the station, and explain matters. Mr. Borlase will watch the case for me."

"But you'll come to see him again, sir?"

"Most decidedly. This is Friday. I shall come again on Monday by the same train. The case is rather a critical one."

"You don't think there's any danger, sir?"

"Not immediate danger; but the man's constitution has been undermined by hard work and illness in India, and he's not a good subject for rheumatic fever. However, I shall be able to say more on Monday. In the mean time, the grand question is good nursing. I think I had better send you a professional nurse."

Mrs. Johns protested her ability to nurse the Colonel herself; but the physician shook his head.

"My good creature, you have your house to look after," he said, "and that poor fellow will want constant watching. We must expect delirium in such a case. You and your husband must contrive to look after him to-night, and I will send you a reliable person early to-morrow morning."

Having made this promise, the doctor got into the fly from the Rose and Crown, and drove back to Penjudah, where he had a brief interview with Mr. Borlase, who came out of his trim-looking stone house and stood upon the pavement before his door while the great man talked to him out of the fly.

"I shall send a nurse from Plymouth to-morrow morning," said the physician. "There's no one about here, I suppose, that one could depend upon for such a case?"

"I don't know about that," replied Mr. Borlase. "There's a person I've had a good deal to do with lately amongst my very poor patients, and if you could only get her, you'd find her

a treasure; but whether she would attend a wealthy person as a paid servant is a question I can't answer. She has only nursed the poor hereabouts, and evidently does it as a pious duty. I fancy, from her dress and manner, that she belongs to some religious community—not exactly Roman Catholic perhaps, but very near it."

"Who is she?"

"A Mrs. Chapman—a widow; poor herself, I suppose, for she occupies very humble lodgings in Bolter's row, at the other end of the town. She never takes payment from any one; indeed, she only attends a class that are quite unable to pay. She is a young woman, fragile-looking, and very pretty; but she is the best nurse I ever met with."

"I don't think the Colonel will object to her youth and good looks," said the doctor, laughing. "That kind of thing is much pleasanter in a sick-room than some gorgon of the Gamp species. Have you known this Mrs. Chapman long?"

"Not long. She has only been here three months; but I have seen a great deal of her in that time; and I can answer for her patience and devotion."

"I've half an hour to spare before my train starts. I'll go down to Bolter's row, and have a look at this paragon of yours."

"I'm sure you will be pleased with her; but I very much doubt your being able to get her to do what we want," said Mr. Borlase.

"We'll see about that," answered the physician, who had some confidence in his own powers of persuasion. "You say the woman is poor. She'll scarcely care to decline an advantageous offer, I should think. Good-night, Borlase. Be sure you go to Trewardell the first thing to-morrow."

With this injunction the doctor drove away down the little hilly High street to the outskirts of Penjudah, where he alighted, and groped his way along a narrow alley of queer old-fashioned cottages, so crooked that they seemed scarcely able to support themselves in a standing position.

Upon inquiring for Mrs. Chapman, he was directed to the last house in Bolter's-row, and he was ushered into a tiny sitting-room, daintily neat, and with an air of freshness and prettiness that struck him as something beyond the common graces of poverty. The room was dimly lighted by one candle, beside which a woman sat reading; a slim fragile creature in a black gown and a white muslin cap of some peculiar fashion, a cap which concealed almost every vestige of her hair, and gave a nunlike aspect to her pale thin face.

The doctor felt at once that this was no vulgar sick-nurse. This was not a woman to whom he could broadly offer money as an inducement to her to depart from her established round of duty.

He told her his errand, told her what he had heard from Mr. Borlase, and how anxious he was to secure her services for a gentleman lying dangerously ill.

"It is quite impossible," she said, in a sweet voice. "I nurse only the very poor."

"You belong to some sisterhood, I suppose?" said the physician.

"No; I belong to no sisterhood," she answered, with something that was half bitterness, half sorrow in her tone; "I stand quite alone in the world."

"Pray pardon me; I thought by your dress you might be a member of one of those communities so numerous nowadays."

"No, sir. It is a simple dress, and suits my circumstances; that is my only reason for wearing it. I have made my own line of duty, and try to follow it."

"I wonder you should have chosen so obscure a place as Penjudah as a field for your charitable work. Do you belong to this part of the country?"

"No. The place is quiet, and I can live cheaply here. Up to this time I have always found plenty of work."

"The duty you have chosen is a very noble one, and the sacrifice most admirable in so young a woman."

"It is no sacrifice for me," she answered decisively; and the doctor felt he had no right to ask any more questions.

He pressed his request very warmly, however; so much so, that at last Mrs. Chapman seemed almost inclined to yield.

"You have owned that you have no pressing duties in Penjudah just now," he said, when they had been talking together for some time; "and I do assure you that you will be performing a real act of charity in looking after this poor fellow at Trewardell."

It was the first time he had mentioned the name of the place.

"At Trewardell, did you say?" asked Mrs. Chapman.

"Yes. It's a gentleman's house, seven miles from here; a charming place. This Colonel Benyon is a friend of the owner, who has lived abroad for some years. Pray, now, consider the case, and extend your charity to this poor man, Mrs. Chapman. Remember it's not as if he were in the bosom of his family. He's quite alone, with no one in the house but servants, and a stranger in the land, as one may say. Of course I might send a nurse from Plymouth, as I intended in the first case; but after what Mr. Borlase told me, I set my heart upon having you."

"Mr. Borlase is very good. I will come."

He had expected to conquer in the end, but had not expected her to yield so suddenly.

"You will! That's capital; and allow me to say that, as far as remuneration goes, you will be quite at liberty to name your own terms."

"Pray do not mention that. I could not possibly take payment for my services. I shall come to Colonel Benyon as I should to the poorest patient in Penjudah."

"Do just what you please, only come; and the sooner the better."

"I can come immediately—to-night, if you please."

"I should be very glad if you will do so. I am just off to the station, and will send my fly to take you back to Trewardell."

"Back to Trewardell!" Mrs. Chapman repeated those three last words as if there were something strange in them.

The doctor was too hurried to notice anything peculiar in her tone. As it was, he ran some risk of losing his train. He wished her good-night, and went back to the fly.

CHAPTER IV.

"There are some things hard to understand:
O, help me, my God, to trust in Thee;
But I never shall forget her soft white hand,
And her eyes when she looked at me."

COLONEL BENYON had a hard time of it. Again, as in his Indian bungalow, grim death claimed him for his own, and was only to be kept at bay by prodigies of care and skill; again the lamp of life flickered low, and for a while the sick man lay in a land where all was darkness, knowing no one, remembering nothing, and suffering the unspeakable agonies of a mind distraught. There is no need to describe the variations of the fever, the changes from bad to worse, the faint improvement, the threatened relapse. Through all that month of September Mr. Borlase came twice a day, and the Plymouth physician twice a week to Trewardell. They both declared themselves proud of their victory when Herbert Benyon could be fairly pronounced out of danger. They both acknowledged that they owed that victory, under Providence, to Mrs. Chapman.

She had been indefatigable, working and watching by day and night with a quiet patience that knew no limit. No other hand than hers had ever administered the Colonel's medicine, or smoothed his pillow, since she came to Trewardell; no eyes but hers had watched him in the dead of the night. It was quite in vain that Mr. Borlase and Mrs. Johns had urged her to accept assistance, to let some one relieve her of her night watch now and then. Upon this point she was inexorable. If she ever slept at all, she so planned her slumbers that they should not interfere with her duties. Sometimes in the dusk of the even-

ing, when it was very nearly dark even out of doors, she would take a solitary walk in the gardens for half an hour or so. That was her only relaxation. Sweet and gentle as she was in her manners, she was rather an unapproachable person, and she contrived to keep Mrs. Johns at a distance; which was somewhat galling to that matron, who had never been able to beguile her into a little friendly gossip since she entered the house.

"She's as proud as Lucifer, I do believe, in spite of her meek quiet ways," Mrs. Johns declared to her husband, with an aggrieved expression of countenance. "Why, I've scarcely heard her voice half-a-dozen times since she's been here; and I can't say that I've seen her face properly yet, that black hood she wears overshadows it so. I hate such popish ways."

This hood which Mrs. Johns objected to had certainly a somewhat conventional aspect, and served to hide the nurse's pale sweet face much more than the cap in which Dr. Matson had first seen her. The physician perceived the change of headgear when he came to Trewardell, but considered it only a part of that harmless eccentricity which might be permitted to this lay sister of charity.

The time came at last when Herbert Benyon awoke from that long night of suffering and delirium to some faint interest in external things. He had not been unconscious all this time; on the contrary, for long afterwards he had a keen remembrance of every detail of his illness; but mixed up with all the realities of his life had been the dreams and delusions of fever. He knew that throughout his illness by day and night a slender black-robed figure had sat by his bedside, or flitted lightly about his room; he knew that a woman's soft hand had administered to his comforts day after day, without change or weariness; he knew that a very sweet sad face had looked down upon him in the dim lamplight with ineffable pity; but he had cherished strange fancies about this gentle watcher. Sometimes she was a sister he had loved very dearly, and lost in his early youth;

sometimes she was Lady Julia Dursay. That she resembled neither of them mattered little to his wandering mind.

But this was all over now. He knew that he was at Trewardell, and that this black-robed woman was a stranger to him.

It was upon a Sunday, a mild October day, towards sunset, that he felt himself for the first time able to speak to his patient nurse. A broad bay-window in his room looked westward, and he saw the evening sky with a warm rosy light in it, and heard the rooks cawing in the avenue, and the church-bells ringing for evening service.

Mrs. Chapman was sitting by the window reading, with her hood thrown back, and her dark-brown hair only shrouded by her muslin cap. She did not wear the hood always, though Mrs. Johns had never happened to see her without it. She had a habit of throwing it off at times.

The Colonel lay quite motionless, looking at the sky and at that quiet figure by the window, wondering dreamily who this woman was. Her profile was clearly defined against the soft light, as she sat there, unconscious that he was watching her; and Herbert Benyon thought that he had never seen a lovelier face.

It was a spiritualized beauty, sublimated by some great sorrow, the Colonel fancied. The glory and bloom of youth were gone, though the woman was evidently young; but with the loss of these she had gained in the charm of expression. It was a face that went to one's heart.

She turned from the window presently, hearing her patient stir, and came towards the bed. He saw that her eyes were gray, large, and dark, with a plaintive look in them.

"I did not know that you were awake," she said gently. "Let me alter your pillows a little, and then I will bring you some tea."

It was the voice that had been with him in all his foolish dreams. It seemed as if he had come back to life out of a living grave, bringing only this memory with him. She bent over him, arranging the pillow, which had slipped to a position of torture on the edge of the bed. The dexterous hands made all

comfortable in a few moments, while the lovely face looked down upon him.

"How good you have been to me all this time!" he said. He had uttered protestations of gratitude and regard many times during his delirium, but these were the first thoroughly sensible words he had spoken to her.

The surprise overcame her a little. Sudden tears started to her eyes, and she turned her head aside to hide them.

"Thank God!" she exclaimed earnestly; "thank God!"

"For what?" asked the Colonel.

"That you are so much better."

"I have been very ill, then, I suppose?"

"You have been very ill."

"Off my head, haven't I? Yes, I know I thought myself up the country; and that I could hear the jackals screaming outside. And I am really in Cornwall, down at Hammersley's place—poor Hammersley!—and you have been nursing me for I don't know how long! You see I am quite rational now. I thought once you were my sister—a girl who died nearly twenty years ago."

"Yes, you are much better; but pray do not talk. You are very weak still, and the doctors would be angry with me for letting you talk so much."

"Very well. I will be as quiet as a lamb; indeed I don't feel capable of disobeying you. But there is one question that I must ask."

"I do not mind answering one question, if I can."

"To what beneficent influence do I owe your care of me? what freak of fortune brought such a ministering angel to my sick-bed?"

"I am here to perform a work of charity, that is all," she answered quietly; "I am a nurse by profession."

"But you are a lady!" he exclaimed, surprised.

"That does not prevent my nursing the sick."

"Then you do not mean that you are a hospital nurse—a person to be engaged by any one who needs your services?"

"You are asking more than one question. No; I am not a hospital nurse, nor do I take payment for my services."

"I thought not," murmured the Colonel, with a faint sigh of relief.

It would have shocked him, somehow, to discover that the patient watcher whom he had mistaken now for his lost sister—anon for his false love—was only a hireling after all.

"I wished to perform some duty in the world, being quite alone, and I chose that of attendance on the sick poor. I have never wearied of it yet."

"And have you been long engaged in this good work?"

"Not very long; but you must not talk any more. I must positively forbid that."

The Colonel submitted very reluctantly. He was so eager to know all about this woman—this ministering angel, as he called her in his own mind. He repeated Scott's familiar lines in a low voice as she moved softly about the room making preparations for his evening meal.

Betsy Jane, the fat-faced housemaid, brought the tea-tray.

Mrs. Johns had avoided all actual attendance on the sick-room of late, offended by the nurse's stand-offishness. The Colonel did not want her, she said. He had that fine lady with her popish headgear.

Mrs. Chapman arranged the tea-things on the table by the bed—the small home-baked loaf, the tiny rolls of rich yellow butter, and a noble block of honeycomb on a glass dish. There was a nosegay of autumnal flowers, too, for the embellishment of the table; and altogether Herbert Benyon fancied that innocent repast the most tempting banquet that had ever been spread before him.

"Please sit there and pour out my tea," he said in his weak voice. "But see, you have forgotten your own cup and saucer," he added, looking at the table.

"I will drink my tea presently."

"You must drink it now with me, or I will drink none."

She complied; it was not worth while arguing with him

about such a trifle. She brought the second cup and saucer, and sat where he ordered her. He looked at her very often as he sipped the tea she had poured out for him, and ate bread and honey, like the queen in the famous nursery rhyme. He looked at her, wondering what her life had been, with an intense curiosity only possible to a prisoner in a sick-room. He would have given the world to question her farther; but that was forbidden, to say nothing of the impertinence of such a proceeding. He was fain to lie there, and look at her with fixed dreamy eyes, speculating idly about her and her history.

The patient had taken a turn, and the doctors rejoiced exceedingly; but his progress even now was very slow. He lay for four long weeks almost as helpless as a child, attended upon day and night by Mrs. Chapman and a young man out of the stables, a handy young fellow, whose genius had been developed by the exigencies of the case, and who made a very decent amateur valet. How he should have endured this dreary time without Mrs. Chapman's care and companionship, Herbert Benyon could not imagine. She brightened the dismal monotony of the sick-room, and lightened his burden for him more than words could tell; and yet she was by no means what any one would call a lively person. Indeed, after that close companionship of many weeks, Colonel Benyon could not remember ever having seen her smile. But her presence had an influence upon him that was better than commonplace cheerfulness. She read to him, and the low sweet voice was like music. She talked to him, and every word helped to reveal the wealth of a highly-cultivated mind. With such a companion life could not be irksome, even in a sick-room.

Before the fourth week of that first stage of his convalescence was ended, Colonel Benyon had made many efforts to learn his nurse's history; but had failed utterly in the endeavor.

"My story is common enough," she told him once, when he said that he was convinced there was some romance in her life.

"I have lost all that I ever loved, and am obliged to interest myself in strangers."

"You are very young to be a widow," said the Colonel. "Had you been long married when Mr. Chapman died?"

A sudden look of pain came into her face.

"Not very long. Please do not ask me to recall my past life. My history is the history of the dead."

After this he could not push his curiosity farther; but he was not a little tormented by his desire to know more. In the dead of the night he lay awake saying to himself, "Who the deuce could this Chapman have been to leave his wife in such a desolate position? and what has become of her own relations? I would stake my chances of promotion that she is a lady by birth; but how comes a lady to be left to carry out such a quixotic scheme as this sick-nursing business?" For to the Colonel's mundane mind the nursing of the sick poor seemed an eccentric, an abnormal employment for a well-bred young woman—above all, for a beautiful woman like this widow, with the classic profile and luminous gray eyes.

As soon as the Colonel was strong enough to totter from his bed to a sofa, Dr. Matson suggested a change of quarters.

"You must get nearer the sea," he said; "this flowery dell is all very well in its way; and you certainly do get a sniff of the Atlantic mixed with the perfume of your roses. But I should like to plant you somewhere on the very edge of the ocean. There is a decent inn at Penjudah, now, directly facing the sea, built almost upon the beach; a homely place enough, but where you would get very good treatment. I think we might move you there with advantage."

The Colonel groaned.

"I don't feel strong enough to be moved from one room to another," he said.

"I daresay not. There's a good deal of prostration still, no doubt; but the change would do you a world of good. We must manage it somehow—contrive some kind of ambulance,

and carry you in a recumbent position. Mrs. Chapman will go with you, of course."

The Colonel's face brightened at this suggestion.

"Would you go?" he asked, looking at his nurse.

"Of course she would. She's not done with you yet, by any means. You are not going to slip out of our hands for some little time, I assure you, Colonel Benyon," said Dr. Matson, with professional jocosity.

"I do not wish; I am quite content to remain an invalid," replied the Colonel, looking at his nurse and not at his doctor.

The physician saw the look.

"Bless my soul," he said to himself, "is that the way the cat jumps? The Colonel's friends won't thank me for getting him such a good nurse, if he winds up by marrying her. That look was very suspicious."

The doctor had his way. The chief inn at Penjudah was quite empty at this late period of the year; and the best rooms, old-fashioned capacious chambers facing the sea, were at the patient's disposal. So one fine morning in the beginning of November, while the reddened leaves in this mild western country still lingered on the trees, Colonel Benyon left Trewardell, which had been a somewhat unlucky shelter, it seemed.

Even on that last morning busy Mrs. Johns scarcely caught so much as a glimpse of the nurse's face; but just at the final moment, when the Colonel had been made comfortable in the carriage, wrapped up to the eyes in woollen rugs and tiger-skins, Mrs. Chapman turned and held out her hand to the housekeeper. She had her veil down, a thick black veil, and she wore a close black bonnet of a somewhat by-gone fashion.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Johns," she said in her low plaintive voice. "This is the last time I shall ever see Trewardell. Please shake hands before I go away."

There was something that seemed almost humility in her tone. The housekeeper drew herself up rather stiffly, quite taken by surprise; and then, in the next moment, her good nature got the better of her resentment, and she took the proffered hand.

What a slender little hand it seemed in the grasp of Sarah Johns' stout fingers!

"I am sure I bear you no malice, mum," she said, "though you have kept yourself so much to yourself, as if other folks weren't good enough for you; and if you like to walk over from Penjudah any fine afternoon to take a cup of tea with me and my husband, you'll be heartily welcome. There's always a bit of cold meat and an apple-pasty in the house."

"You are very kind; but I feel somehow that I shall never see Trewardell again. May I gather one of those late roses? Thanks; I should like to take one away."

She went to one of the standard rose-trees on the lawn, and gathered one solitary tea-rose—a pale primrose-colored flower—a melancholy-looking blossom, the Colonel thought, when she took her seat in the carriage with this rose in her hand.

"I don't like to see you with that pale yellow flower," he said; "it reminds me of asphodel, and seems symbolical of death. I should like to do away with that ugly black bonnet, and crown you with a garland of bright red roses, the emblems of renewed youth and hope."

She looked at him with sad earnest eyes.

"I have done with youth," she said, "and with hope, except—"

"Except what?" he asked eagerly.

"Except a hope that I do not care to talk about—the hope of something beyond this earth."

After this the Colonel was silent. There was something in those grave words that sounded like a reproof.

Mrs. Johns stood in the porch watching the carriage drive away, with a thoughtful countenance. "What was in her voice just now that gave me the shivers?" she said to herself, perplexed in spirit.

CHAPTER V.

"So may one read his weird, and reason,
And with vain drugs assuage no pain;
For each man in his loving season
Fools and is fooled of these in vain.

Charms that allay not any longing,
Spells that appease not any grief,
Time brings us all by handfuls, wronging
All hurts with nothing of relief."

COLONEL BENYON was in love. That rigid disciplinarian, that battered soldier, who had boasted for the last fifteen years of his freedom from anything approaching what he called "an entanglement," now awoke to the consciousness that he was the veriest fool in the universe, and that unless he could win this woman, of whose antecedents he knew nothing, for his wife, he was a lost man. That he could return to the outer world, that he could go back to India and begin life again without her, seemed to him impossible. His world had narrowed itself into the sick-chamber where she ministered to him. All the voices of this earth seemed to have melted into that one low tender voice that read to him or talked with him in the long tranquil evenings. Until now he had scarcely known the meaning of a woman's companionship. Never had he lived in such close intimacy with any one, not even a masculine friend. But now he looked back at his hard commonplace life, the conventional society, the stereotyped pleasures, and wondered how he had endured so many years of such a barren existence. He loved her. For a long time—his idle weeks in that sick-room had seemed so long, giving him so much leisure for thought—he had struggled against this folly, if folly it were; but he had struggled in vain. He loved her. Her, and none other, would he have for his wife; and he told himself that it was, after all, no great sacrifice which he contemplated making. That she was a lady he had never doubted from the first hour when, restored to his sober senses, he had looked at her face and heard her voice. It

was just possible that she was born of a less noble race than his own, though he could scarcely bring himself to believe even this; it was more than probable that she was very poor. The Colonel was glad of this last fact. It pleased him to think that his wealth might give her a new and brighter life, surrounding her with all those luxuries and elegancies which seemed the natural attributes of her beauty.

Was there any hope for him? Well, yes, he was inclined to believe his case far from desperate. There was a subtle something in her looks and tones at times that made him fancy he was not quite indifferent to her, that he was more than the mere object of her charity. Nothing could be more vague than these signs and tokens, for she was the most reserved of women—the proudest he sometimes thought—and he felt convinced that she was herself unconscious of them. But, slight as they were, they were sufficient to kindle hope in Herbert Benyon's breast, and he fancied that he had only to wait the fulness of time for the hour of his confession and the certainty of his happiness.

He was not eager to speak. There was time enough. This tranquil daily intercourse was so sweet to him, that he almost feared to end it by assuming a new relation to his gentle nurse. He did not want to scare her away just yet, even if she left him only to come back to him later as his wife. He wanted to have her all to himself a little longer in this easy undisturbed companionship.

So the days and weeks went on. The Colonel grew so much stronger, that Dr. Matson bade him good-bye, and even Mr. Borlase began to talk of releasing him. He was able to take a short stroll in the sunniest hour of the autumn day, leaning on his cane, and occasionally getting a little help from his nurse's supporting arm. He was very fond of Penjudah; the scattered houses on the sea-shore—the curious old-fashioned High-street straggling up a hill—the sheltered nook upon the grassy hillside, that served as a burial-ground for the population of Penjudah—the rustic lanes, from which one looked right out upon the broad Atlantic—all these things grew very dear to the

Colonel, and it seems to him that he could be content to live in this remote western haven for ever with this one woman for his companion.

It was very nearly the end of November, but the weather was wonderfully mild in this region, the days bright and balmy, the evenings clear and calm. The Colonel stopped to rest sometimes in the burial-ground, seated on a moss-grown granite tomb, with his face towards the sea, and Mrs. Chapman by his side.

He had told her all the story of his past life, even that ignominious episode of Lady Julia Dursay's ill-treatment. It was his delight to talk to her. He confided in her as he had never done in any one else. He had such unbounded faith in her integrity, such a fixed belief in her good sense. He had talked to her of his friend Hammersley, and had told her the story of the guilty mistress of Trewardell.

"Strange that we should both have come to grief about a woman, isn't it?" he asked; and Mrs. Chapman owned that it was very strange.

"You'd heard the story before, I daresay," remarked the Colonel. "I suppose all the gossips of Penjudah know it by heart?"

"Yes," she answered, "everybody in Cornwall knows it."

It was the last day of November. Mr. Borlase had again talked about taking leave of his patient, and the Colonel was sitting on his favorite tomb, the memorial of some race whose grandeur was a memory of the past. He began to think the time was drawing near when he must make his confession and hear his fate. He was no coxcomb, yet he had no fear of the result; indeed, he was certain that she loved him. While he was meditating this in a dreamy way, in no hurry to speak, and quite satisfied with the happiness of having the woman he loved by his side, Mrs. Chapman suddenly broke the silence.

"You are so much better, Colonel Benyon," she began—"almost well, indeed, Mr. Borlase says—that I think you can afford to spare me now. I have stayed with you already much longer than I felt to be really necessary, only"—she hesitated

just for a moment, and then went rapidly on—"only yours was a critical case, and I did not wish to leave you while there was the faintest chance of relapse. There is no fear of that now, and I am wanted elsewhere. There is a little boy in one of the cottages up the hill dying of consumption. His mother came to the hotel to speak to me last night, and I have promised her to go to him this evening."

"This evening!" cried the Colonel aghast. "You mean to leave me this evening!"

"To go to a dying child, yes, Colonel Benyon," the nurse answered reproachfully. "There is so little that I can do for you now—for I suppose you may be trusted to take your medicines regularly—you really do not want me any longer."

"I do not want you any longer!" repeated the Colonel, "I want you all my life. I want you for my wife!" he went on, laying his hand upon her shoulder. "I cannot live without you. You must stay with me, dearest, or only leave me to come back to me as my wife. We have no need of a long courtship. I think we know each other thoroughly as it is."

"You think you know me thoroughly as it is!" the woman echoed, shrinking away from him, and standing with her face turned towards the sea, only the profile visible to the Colonel, and upon that the impress of a misery that struck him to the soul.

"My dear love, what is this?" he asked. "Have I distressed you so much by my avowal? Am I so utterly repugnant to you?"

"Your wife," she murmured, as if she had scarcely heard his last words, "your wife!"

"Yes, dearest, my beloved and honored wife. I did not believe it was in my nature to love any one as I love you."

"That any man upon this earth should care for me!" she murmured; "you, above all other men!" And then turning to him with a calmer face, she said decisively, "That can never be, Colonel Benyon. You and I can never be more to one another than we have been. The wisest thing you can do is to

wish me good-bye, here where we stand, and forget that you have ever known me."

"That is just the last thing possible to me," he answered impetuously. "There is nothing upon this earth I care to live for, if I cannot have you for my wife. You must have known that I loved you. You had no right to stay with me so long; you had no right to let me love you, if you meant to treat me like this at the last. But you do not mean to be so cruel; you are only trying me; you are only playing with your victim. O my darling, for pity's sake, tell me that I am not quite in different to you!"

"That is not the question," the woman replied quietly. "Have you thought of what you are doing, Colonel Benyon? Have you counted the cost? Have you thought what it is to intrust your name and your honor to the keeping of a woman of whom you know nothing?"

"I know that you are an angel," he said, putting his arm round the slender figure, trying to draw her to his breast.

Again she shrank from him—this time with a gesture so repellent, that he drew back involuntarily, chilled to the heart. "Do not touch me," she said. "You do not know who and what I am."

"I ask to know nothing," he cried vehemently. "If there is any secret in your past life that might divide us, hide it from me. Do you think I am going to bring the scrutiny of a detective to bear upon the antecedents of the woman I love? Blindly I give my happiness and my honor into your keeping. I see you, and love you for what you are—not for what evil fortune may have made you in the past."

"You do not know the weight of your words," she answered sadly. "I thank you with all my heart for your confidence, for your love; but that which you think you wish can never be. It is best for us to part this very day, this very moment. Let us shake hands, Colonel Benyon, and say farewell."

"Not till you have told me your reasons," the Colonel cried imperiously. "I may know those, at least."

"I do not recognize your right to question me. I cannot explain my reasons."

"But I will know them," he cried, seizing her wrist. "I have been fooled by one woman; I will not be trifled with by another. I will know why you refuse to be my wife. Is it because you hate or despise me?"

"No, no, no; you *know* that it is not that!"

She looked at him piteously, with a look that said as plainly as any words she could have spoken, "You know that I love you."

"Is it from any mistaken notion of fidelity to the dead?"

"No, it is not that. Yet, heaven knows, I have reason to be faithful to the dead."

"What is it, then? You must and shall tell me."

"For pity's sake, spare me. You are torturing me, Colonel Benyon."

"Give me your promise to be my wife, then, and I will not ask a question. There can be no strong reason enough to divide us, if you love me; and I think you do."

"Heaven help me!" she sobbed, clasping her hands with a piteous gesture.

To Herbert Benyon those three words sounded like a confession. He was sure that she loved him, sure that his will must conquer hers in the end.

"Yes," she cried passionately, "I do love you. Nothing could excuse such an admission from my lips but the knowledge that in this hour we part for ever. I do love you, Colonel Benyon; but there is nothing in this world that would induce me to become your wife, even if you knew the worst I can tell and were yet willing to take me, which you would not be."

"You are wrong," he exclaimed with an oath. "There is nothing you can tell me that can change my resolution, or diminish my love."

"Do not promise so rashly," she answered, ashy pale, and with tremulous lips.

He drew her to the old granite tomb, and persuaded her to sit down beside him, seeing that she was nearly fainting.

"My love, I do not wish to be cruel," he said, tenderly. "I do not seek to lift the veil of the past. I am content to love you blindly, foolishly, if you like. I will do anything to prove my devotion, will shape the whole course of my future life for your happiness. There is nothing in the world I would not sacrifice for your sake. Be generous, for your part, dearest Say that you will be my wife, or give me some adequate reason for your denial."

She did not answer him immediately. There was a silence of some moments, and then she said in a low voice:

"You have a friend to whom you are very much attached, Colonel Benyon, a friend who is almost as dear to you as a brother. I have heard you say that."

"What, Hammersley? Yes, certainly; Hammersley is a dear good fellow; but what has he to do with my marrying as I please? I should not consult him about *that*."

"You were talking the other night of that guilty creature—his wife."

"Yes, I have spoken to you about his wife."

"You have—in terms of reprobation which were well deserved. Have pity upon me, Colonel Benyon—I am that wretched woman!"

She had slipped from the tombstone to the turf beside it, and remained there, half crouching, half kneeling, in her utter abasement, with her face hidden.

"You!" exclaimed the Colonel, in a thick voice. "You!"

The blow seemed almost to crush him. He felt for the moment stupefied, stunned. He had been prepared for anything but this.

"I am that wretched woman. I do not know if there is the shadow of excuse for my sin in the story of my life; but, at any rate, it is best that you should know it. George Champney and I were engaged to be married long before I saw Mr. Hammersley; and when he went to India, we were pledged to wait

till he should come back and make me his wife. We had known each other from childhood; and I cannot tell you how dearly I loved him. It means a mockery now to speak of this when I have not even been faithful to his memory; but I did love him. I have mourned him as truly as ever any man was lamented upon this earth. From the first my father was opposed to our engagement, and my stepmother, a very worldly woman, set her face against it most resolutely. But we braved their displeasure, and held our own in spite of them. It was only when George was gone that their persecution became almost unendurable to me. I need not enter into details. Captain Champney had been away more than two years when I first met Mr. Hammersley. We were forbidden to write to each other; and I had suffered unspeakable anxiety about him in that time. It was only in some indirect manner that I ever had news of him. When Mr. Hammersley first proposed to me, I refused him decisively; but then followed a weary time in which I was tormented by my stepmother, and even by my father, who was influenced by her in this business. I do not think any man can understand the kind of domestic persecution which women are subject to—the daily reproach, the incessant worry. But I went through this ordeal. It was only when my father brought home a newspaper containing the announcement of George Champney's death that my courage gave way. They let me alone for some time after this, let me indulge my grief unmolested; and then, one day, the old arguments, the familiar reproaches, began again; and in an hour of fatal weakness, worn out in body and mind—for I had been very ill for a long time after that bitter blow—I yielded."

She paused for a little; but the Colonel did not speak. He sat upon the granite tomb, looking seaward with haggard eyes, motionless as a statue, the living image of despair. He could have borne anything but this.

"You know the rest. No, you can never know how I suffered. The false announcement in the paper had been an error, common enough in those days, Captain Champney told me,

when he came upon me one summer morning near Trewardell like a ghost. He had heard of the report in India, and had written to a common friend of ours, entreating her to let me know the truth; whether she had attempted to do so, and had been in some manner prevented by my father or my stepmother, I cannot tell. Another Champney had been killed. The mistake was only the insertion of the wrong initials; but it was a fatal error for us two. He came to me to remind me of my promise; came determined to take me away from my husband. I cannot speak of the events that came afterwards. There was no such thing as happiness possible for either of us. We were not wicked enough to be happy in spite of our sin. You know how they found George Champney lying dead on the sands at Blankenburg one bright September morning. After that I had a dangerous illness, during which I was taken to a Belgian convent, by my husband's influence, I believe, where I was tenderly nursed till I recovered. They knew my story, those spotless nuns, and yet were kind to me. I stayed with them as a boarder for a year after—after Mr. Hammersley obtained his divorce; and it was there I learned to nurse the sick. I was not destitute; a sister of my mother's, knowing my position, settled a small annuity upon me; and on that I have lived ever since. Six months ago I was seized with a yearning to see the place where the most tranquil days of my life had been spent. I knew that Mr. Hammersley was living abroad; and I fancied that I ran no risk of recognition in returning to this neighborhood. I knew how much misery and illness had changed me since I left Trewardell. It was a foolish fancy, no doubt; but I, who had nothing human left to love, may be forgiven for a weak attachment to familiar places. I came to Penjudah, thinking that I should find plenty of work here of the kind I wanted. I had no intention of coming any nearer to Trewardell, where I must, of course, run considerable risk of being recognized; but when Dr. Matson urged me to come to you the temptation was too strong for me, and I came to see the dear old place once more. That is the end of my story;

and now, Colonel Benyon, I have but one word more to say—Farewell!"

She rose from the ground, and was going to leave him; but he detained her.

"You have almost broken my heart," he said; "but there is nothing in this world can change my love for you. I still ask you to be my wife. I promise to cherish you with a love that shall blot out the memory of your past."

She shook her head sadly.

"It can never be," she answered; "I am not vile enough to trade upon your weakness or your generosity. Let me be faithful to the dead, and loyal to you. Once more, good-bye."

"Will nothing I can say prevail with you?"

"Nothing. I shall always honor and revere you as the most generous of men; but you and I must never meet after to-day."

He pleaded with her a little longer, trying by every possible argument to vanquish her resolution; but his endeavors were all in vain. He knew that she loved him; he felt that he was doomed to lose her.

And so at last she left him, sitting in the quiet burial-ground, in the pale winter sunshine, with all the glory of the Atlantic before him, and the stillness of a desert round about. Even after she had left him he determined upon making one more attempt to win her. He found out the place where she lived, and went to that humble alley in the early dusk, bent upon seeing her once more, upon pleading his cause more calmly, more logically, than it had been possible for him to do in the first heat of his passion. He found the house, and a very civil good-natured woman, who told him that Mrs. Chapman had left Penjudah two hours before, for good. She had gone abroad, the woman said.

"To Belgium, I suppose."

"Yes, sir, that was the name of the place."

As soon as he was strong enough Colonel Benyon went to Belgium, where he spent a couple of months searching for Flora Hammersley in all the convents. It was a long weari-

some search; but he went through with it patiently to the end, persevering until he found a quiet little conventual retreat six miles from Louvain, where boarders were admitted. It was the place where she had been. His search was ended; and the woman he loved had been buried in the tiny convent cemetery just a week before he came there. After this there was nothing left for the Colonel but to go back to India to the old familiar life. It was only his closest friends who ever perceived the change in him; but, although he never spoke of his trouble, those who did thoroughly know him, knew that he had suffered some recent heart-wound, and that the stroke had been a heavy one.

THE ZOOPHYTE'S REVENGE.

CHAPTER I.

IS name was Reginald Ravenscroft—rather a pretty name, as he used to say himself in a plaintive manner, if any one would have been so good as to call him by it—but he had been named the Zoophyte by his brother officers in the Queen's Trumpeters, of which favorite corps he had been captain—the Zoophyte, ordinarily abbreviated for convenience into the Zoo.

This sobriquet had been bestowed upon Captain Ravenscroft on account of a certain easiness—not to say laziness of disposition which formed the most salient feature in his character. In all their experience of him—and he had been a member of that crack regiment for some ten years—the Queen's Trumpeters had never seen Reginald Ravenscroft in any other than that placid and lamblike condition which was his natural temperament. He had had his trials in those years, of course—petty annoyances and small vexations, insolent letters from tradesmen and attorneys, aggravating blunders on the part of his body-servant, refusals to cash up from his relatives—vexations which would have thrown other men into raging passions, and sent them stamping about their quarters in a state of temporary lunacy; but they had no more discomposing effect upon Captain Ravenscroft than if he had indeed been one of those strange dabs of gelatinous matter which one sees sticking to the rocks

at low tide. He swore, it is true; indeed, his *répertoire* of bad language was considerably in advance of that of his fellows, being richly garnished with the choicest flowers from Billingsgate and Seven-Dials, and strengthened by some very original blasphemies of his own composition; but the Queen's Trumpeters declared it was the funniest thing in the world to hear him give utterance to a lengthened string of blackguardisms which would have astonished any rough in St. Giles's, in the mildest tones, and with a most perfect placidity of face and manner. People were very fond of him, although it must be freely admitted, he had never been known to be of very much use to any of his fellow-creatures. The idea of doing any one a service never entered his sluggish brain; but, on the other hand, he never gave offence to any human being. So people liked him for being good-tempered and agreeable, and freely forgave him his uselessness.

He was very handsome. This fact may have had some influence upon the minds of his acquaintance, for his good looks were of an eminently pleasing and conciliating type. He had a nose that was almost as straight and delicately chiselled as the nose of a Greek statue—Pericles or Alcibiades—a pale complexion—which his female acquaintance called interesting, but which he himself described as bilious—dreamy gray eyes with long black lashes, the most expressive eyebrows, and a low broad forehead, crowned with crisply waving dark hair. There was a want of force and firmness about the mouth and chin; but a moustache concealed the weakness of one feature, and a beard gave form and character to the other; so, upon the whole, the Zoophyte was about as handsome a man as you would be likely to see in any given day's journey.

He was by no means a fop; but he was quite aware that he was good-looking, and would state the fact, in a business-like manner, in any discussion of his affairs and prospects. He dressed well, of course. To belong to the Queen's Trumpeters and not to dress well would have been an impossibility. The newest combinations of color in cravats, the last designs in

socks, the most novel devices in dress-shirts, were scarcely fresh enough for the Trumpeters; while the amount to which every one of these gentlemen became annually indebted to his tailor and his bootmaker would have been a fair income for a moderate-sized family. The Trumpeters were extravagant, and prided themselves on their extravagance.

From his earliest youth upwards debt and difficulty had been, as it were, the normal condition of the Zoophyte—difficulty for other people, that is to say; for his debts had never been a cause of disturbance to his own lymphatic temper. It was his habit to allow matters to go on till they became utterly desperate, when he would coolly hand over to his wealthy sister, Lady Talmash Brading, a tangled mass of correspondence from tradesmen and attorneys, not one letter of which had ever been replied to, and leave her and her solicitors to settle the business exactly as they pleased.

She was a very kind sister, and had paid Reginald Ravenscroft's debts so often, that it had become in a manner an established thing that she should pay them. He scarcely thanked her. "What the deuce has she to do with her money?" he would say, when any one lauded her generosity; "she is so preposterously rich, that I consider I do her an actual favor in relieving her of a little of her superfluous cash. It's like a periodical blood-letting. She would be subject to a kind of financial apoplexy, if it were not for me—would expire of a golden plethora."

There are limits, however, to human patience, and Lady Talmash Brading was beginning to grow very tired of her brother Reginald's periodical insolvencies—the tailors' and bootmakers' and shirt-makers' and perfumers' bills; the heavy accounts from elegant purveyors in St. James's-street, who pleasantly combine the daily necessities of stationer with the glittering temptations of the jeweller, so that the idle swell, being smitten by the effect of some curious monogram on his note-paper, might have it repeated in emeralds and diamonds, or ruby and onyx, as the case may be, on his scarf-pin and shirt-studs, a locket or a pair of

sleeve-links; the fearful list of goods supplied by crack saddlers and spur-makers—the endless catalogue of expensive articles which had been necessary to the existence of Captain Ravenscroft during two or three years of that gentleman's harmless career. Lady Talmash Brading was beginning to grow weary of these things.

"It is always the same, Reginald," she said; "or if there is any change, it is for the worse. I can't comprehend it. You can't possibly be always wanting the same things—watch-chains and rings and studs and pins. Those things don't wear out."

"No, my dear Leonora; but a fellow loses them, and gives them away, and so on. If a fellow one likes sees a thing of that kind on one's dressing-table and takes a fancy to it, how can one do less than offer it to him? Studs and breast-pins are the small change of life, like fourpenny-bits. And then they go out of fashion—they get known; you couldn't expect a man to wear a thing he had had over a month. I've a vague recollection of having read somewhere that Heliogabalus would as soon have thought of wearing his shoes twice as a ring—and you wouldn't have an officer in the Queen's Own Trumpeters less particular than a dirty Roman Emperor."

Lady Talmash Brading only shrugged her shoulders impatiently in reply to this remonstrance. She was walking up and down her splendid drawing-rooms in Grosvenor-square, while the Zoophyte lounged at his ease in one satin-covered arm-chair, with his legs stretched before him on another, and a *Morning Post* spread out upon his knees. He had a glass stuck in one eye, through which he lazily surveyed the impetuous movements of his sister.

"I have no common patience," she explained at last. "If you took the least trouble to regulate your affairs, one wouldn't mind so much; but you don't—you allow matters to go on till they can go no farther, and then just fling a mass of bills over to me and expect me to pay them. I don't believe you even know what you owe."

"I confess, my dear sister, that I have not even an approxi-

mate idea of the amount. But why distress yourself upon the subject? the affair is such a mere bagatelle to you. Why not hand the documents over to your steward, and dismiss the business from your mind altogether."

"That is not my way of doing things, Reginald," answered his sister severely.

"Unhappily not, my dear creature. You are so awfully business-like."

"If you were a little more business-like, a little more reasonable, Reginald, I should have some hope of you. If you would only remember that my patience may be exhausted, and learn to economise— —"

"Economise in the Queen's Trumpeters! Not to be done, my dear soul. I believe there was a man once in the corps who tried to live within his income, and they did something dreadful to him—filled his bed with empty soda-water bottles with the wires on, or tarred and feathered him, or tried him by court-martial, or told him he'd better sell out, or something ferocious in that way. No, Leonora, as long as I remain a Trumpeter, I shall do my duty."

"Then I should think the sooner you cease to be a Trumpeter, the better. If you mean always to go on as you have been going on for the last ten years, you'd better sell out at once."

"Do you really think so?" murmured the Zoophyte, staring at her reflectively through his glass. "Well, the question is open to consideration, certainly. I should realize a couple of thousand or so by the sale of my commission; and I never had two thousand pounds of ready money in my life. Two thousand in actual bank-notes and gold!—there must be a good deal of spending in that."

"What!" exclaimed Lady Talmash Brading. "You don't mean that you would really be so mad as to leave the army?"

"Why not? Weren't you recommending it just now? I could live with you. You couldn't refuse shelter to such a harmless fellow as I. I could stroll about the place all day when you were down at Brading, keeping an eye upon the

gardeners, and seeing they didn't waste their time—I should be invaluable in that way. Or I might marry Miss Corks."

"Marry Miss Corks!" cried Lady Talmash Brading, with supreme disdain.

"What! you wouldn't like a brewer's daughter to call you sister-in-law? But upon my word I might do a worse thing for myself: she's a very nice girl—a pretty girl too—and will have a hundred thousand for her fortune. And I think she'd have me. I really don't see why you should set your face against Miss Corks."

If you want to disgrace me in the sight of all Brading by a match of that kind, pray do so; but from the hour in which you do so, you may consider that you and I are strangers—I would never speak to you again."

"Hard lines, rather, Leonora, when such a marriage would make my fortune. But under those circumstances you can't, of course, object to pay my debts occasionally."

"I do object to pay them ever again. I will allow you two hundred a year; and if you can't contrive to live upon that and your pay, you must look elsewhere for assistance. It will be no use appealing to me."

"My dear Leonora, this is positively inhuman—that allusion to my pay is the very essence of mockery. As if my pay had ever counted for anything! O, I see that I must marry Miss Corks."

"Do," said Lady Talmash Brading, "at your peril."

CHAPTER II.

She was a proud woman, Lady Talmash Brading. She had begun life as an acknowledged beauty, and the only daughter of a Somersetshire gentleman of small landed estate; so small indeed, having dwindled down from the fair proportions of the past, that Leonora Ravenscroft felt it incumbent upon her to make a good marriage. She had married young, and she had been twice married—first to Mr. Prothero, the great ship-

builder, a man of untold wealth: and then to Lord Talmash Brading, of Brading Park, Yorkshire, and Talmash Towers, Leicestershire—and she had been twice a widow. She had more estates than she could count on the fingers of one of her pretty plump hands; she had coal-mines in the north, and a tin mine in the west; she had the superbly-appointed house in Grosvenor-square, furnished by the lamented Prothero; the dainty little villa at Cowes, designed and built by the never-too-much-to-be-regretted Talmash; and to inherit all these things she had only one daughter, a fair-haired girl of twelve, born to her a few days before that fatal accident in the hunting-field which caused her second husband's death. Happily for the Zoophyte, this fair-haired young heiress, Julia Talmash Brading, was very fond of her uncle Regy. Not that he had ever done anything to deserve her affection. He existed. That was the highest form of exertion of which this member of the coraline tribe was capable.

After that interview in Grosvenor-square,—which might have been a stormy one, had it been any more possible for one person to sustain the whole burden of a tempest than it is possible for one person to perform a duet,—Lady Talmash Brading vowed a terrible vow that she would never again pay her brother's debts. There were limits to a sister's generosity, she said, and he had overstepped those limits. It would be a wrong done to her precious Julia, if she were to go on being imposed upon in this manner. Granted that she was rich, the wealth of all the Lydian kings, from Candaules downwards, would scarcely have been enough to stand against such extravagance as Reginald Ravenscroft's. He was now clear of debt. He was set on his pins once more, to use the homely language of my lady's solicitor, and this last setting him on his pins had been a more expensive business than usual. She would allow him two hundred a year—fifty pounds a quarter, paid with unerring regularity—and she would do no more.

She kept her word. The Queen's Own Trumpeters were ordered off to Ireland about this time, much to the Zoophyte's

aggravation. If that invertebrate creature could feel strongly upon any point, that point was his attachment to the metropolis. To the profoundest deeps of his nature he was a Cockney. Pall Mall and St. James's-street, with a rare excursus as far as Rotten Row, formed his world. And to be removed to barbarous and unknown regions beyond the reach of this world was the greatest hardship the Zoophyte had ever been called upon to endure. But even this trial could not arouse him to loud lamentations or violent demonstration of any kind. He was heard to utter faint moaning noises like the bleating of a distressed lamb; he swore a little harder than usual in his meek voice, and indeed invented one or two choice forms of execration under this unwonted pressure. He neglected his diet, was seen to take his *potage à l'Italien* without grated Parmesan, and forgot to grumble at the non-appearance of those preliminary natives which he was wont to sacrifice to the gods, as it were, before beginning his dinner. Greater things might have befallen him unheeded in the anguish of this Hibernian exile.

They departed, however, the Queen's Own Trumpeters, in all their supernal splendor, and the Zoophyte had the comfort of knowing that he left the great city without leaving a creditor behind him.

"It's almost melancholy," he said; "I feel as if I had cut myself off from human sympathy. If I were to die suddenly, who the deuce would be sorry for me?"

The Trumpeters were in Ireland for the greater part of a year, and were then transferred to a small garrison town in Lancashire—rather a dreary place, where it might be supposed almost impossible for any man to get into debt. The Zoophyte received his quarterly allowance punctually, and accepted it meekly. He had never been known to refuse money; but he accepted it under mental protest. He found the quarterly remittance rather handy for the payment of his small losses at billiards and whist; and on one occasion, his wandering fancies being caught by a breast-pin exposed for sale in the chief jeweller's of the small garrison town, he bought and paid for the bauble on the spot.

It was about the only transaction in his life in which he had ever employed ready-money, and he informed his friends afterwards that it afforded him a novel sensation.

"I felt that it was low," he said, "decidedly low. I felt myself sunk considerably in the social scale. The idea of entering into a detail of that kind with a tradesman fellow, instead of paying him through my lawyer, in a gentlemanly manner!"

While the Zoophyte endured his exile in Ireland and Lancashire, Lady Talmash Brading was for the greater part of the time travelling in Switzerland and Italy with her "precious Julia." For nearly two years, therefore, she had heard very little of her brother, who had a marked aversion to letter-writing.

"My sister's in Italy, you see," he would remark plaintively, "and people who are away from England are so confoundedly selfish, they expect one to tell them such a lot in one's letters—so I find the only plan is not to write at all."

The brother and sister had not met since that morning in Grosvenor-square when Leonora had vowed a vow that she would never pay Reginald's debts again, when Lady Talmash Brading and her daughter returned from the Continent, and came straight down to Brading Park.

It was midsummer, and the park and gardens were in all their June splendor: the orchard-houses full of rosy velvet-skinned peaches, ruddy nectarines and golden apricots; the kitchen-gardens running over with mellow-flavored peas, wonderful cucumbers, and late asparagus, to say nothing of two or three acres of strawberry-beds, where the fresh green leaves lay lightly on beds of tan or straw, and where a weed would have been as difficult to find as the rarest orchid in the Botanical Dictionary. The Zoophyte was fond of Brading Park; he was especially fond of the kitchen-gardens. He liked to stroll with Julia through the hothouses in the drowsy noontide, stopping now and then to finger the ponderous bunches of grapes with a thoughtful touch, anon to gaze dreamily on a row of pines, or

to pluck a peach that seemed ready to drop into his mouth. He liked Brading Park—the house was a nice sleepy old place, with capacious sofas and easy-chairs in every available corner; sunny nooks in deep south-east windows, where a man might doze over his morning paper; and in all the galleries and reception-rooms thick Axminster carpets that muffled the sound of passing footsteps. The Zoophyte liked Brading—he had his own particular suite of rooms there, and free quarters—"the run of his teeth," as a coarse-minded brother officer had called it. Of course his military engagements had prevented his wearing out his welcome.

Brading seemed very rural and homelike and pleasant to Lady Talmash Brading and her daughter, after those uncomfortable Italian hotels, with their gaudy gilded chambers, and eternal clocks and candelabra. Julia skipped about the gardens in an ecstasy.

"I think there have never been such flowers or such fruit as there are this year, mamma," she exclaimed. "There's only one thing I want to make me quite happy."

"And what is that, my dearest love?"

"Uncle Regy. He would *so* enjoy the peaches—you know how fond he is of peaches; and it is so nice to see him eat them—peeling them so slowly and deliberately with those lazy white hands of his."

"I don't think there is much chance of your seeing your uncle," replied Lady Talmash Brading; "I had occasion to be very much displeased with him when last we met—we had some words, in fact."

"Had words, mamma? Do you mean to say that uncle Regy could possibly quarrel with any one?"

"Well, no, I don't know that Reginald said very much himself, but I said a great deal to him. I was in a passion, Julia, and spoke my mind very freely."

"What had he been doing, mamma?"

"O, the usual thing—getting over head and ears in debt, and then coolly flinging his embarrassments upon me."

The fair young heiress scarcely seemed shocked at this. She only shook her head in a deprecating way.

"We are so rich, mamma dear," she said, "we can afford to pay poor uncle Regy's debts now and then. Military men always get into debt. Grandpapa ought not to have put him into such an expensive regiment as the Queen's Trumpeters."

"That's all very well, Julia, but it has been going on a great deal too long; and when last I saw your uncle, I told him that I should never pay his debts again; upon which he had the impertinence to threaten me that he would marry Miss Corks."

"What, mamma! the daughter of the fat brewer in Brading?"

"Yes, Julia; and there would be a disgrace. Mr. Corks' father was butler to my husband's grandfather, and the son began business in the smallest way in the world. They say he's enormously rich now, but a most ignorant vulgar person. He's very popular in Brading, however, among a certain set, and I believe there are people who visit him."

"Miss Corks rides to hounds, mamma—I've seen her when we've been to see them break covert—rather a nice-looking girl, with wavy brown hair, and a rosy face. It's a pity she's too common for uncle Regy to marry her."

"Too common—yes, I should think so. The idea of the Corks tribe fastening on us!"

"But they are not a very large tribe, mamma; Miss Corks is an only child, isn't she?"

"I believe so," Lady Talmash answered coldly; "but that doesn't make the least difference. The thing is not to be heard of."

The next day was cloudless, but sultry; not a breath stirred the roses on the lawn, or rippled the blue bosom of the lake. Lady Talmash and her daughter sat in the garden after luncheon, in a favorite spot under a mighty plane-tree. They had work with them and books, but neither of them worked or read. It was the laziest possible weather.

"Just the sort of weather that uncle Regy likes, mamma,"

said Julia, "when he can lie on the grass and bask. How he would enjoy Brading this delicious midsummer! I am so sorry to think of him in a nasty dull town in Lancashire."

She had not any prolonged cause for sorrow; for looking up at this very moment, she perceived the object of her thoughts walking slowly across the lawn towards her with the air of having left the house half an hour or so before for an afternoon stroll. It was the Zoophyte's celebrated manner, placid and imperturbable to the last degree.

My lady was fairly taken aback by this apparition.

"Why, Reginald," she exclaimed, "what, in heaven's name, brought you here?"

"The ten o'clock express—leaves King's-cross at ten—a capital train. How d'ye do, Leonora?—how d'ye do, July? What a handsome girl you're growing! You take after your unfortunate uncle, you see, and not the Talmash Bradings. Your father might give you rank, my love, but he couldn't give you beauty. How sweet the old place looks—such a warm sleepiness about it!"

The Zoophyte dropped himself into one of the garden arm-chairs, and stretched out his legs with a complacent air. There was dust upon his boots. He had actually walked half a mile or so.

"I find myself getting fat," he said, in explanation of this unusual circumstance; "so whenever I have an opportunity, I go in for violent exercise. I've walked from the station. I've got some luggage and that kind of thing there—perhaps you'll be good enough to send a trap for it. How are the grapes this year, July?"

"Julia," said her mother, rather stiffly, "go and tell one of the grooms to fetch your uncle's portmanteau."

"But, my dear Leonora, it isn't a portmanteau, it's luggage —large military cases and that kind of thing. You'd better send the biggest vehicle you've got. There's a good lot of it."

My lady opened her fine eyes to their widest extent.

"You mean to honor me with an unusually long visit, it

seems," she said. "I thought the Trumpeters were in Lancashire."

"The Trumpeters are in Lancashire."

"And you have got leave of absence, I suppose?"

"No, my dear Leonora; I have placed myself in a position to be independent of leaves of absence. It's a deuced unpleasant thing asking for leave."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply that I have sold out. I disposed of my commission last week. The Trumpeters are still a very fine corps, but the flower of their flock is lost to them," added the Zoophyte, twirling his moustache.

"Sold out!" cried Lady Talmash Brading, aghast, "sold out!"

"Yes, my dear Leonora. It was your own suggestion. 'If you find the regiment too expensive,' you said, with that stern common sense which has always distinguished you, 'you ought to sell out.' I did find the regiment too expensive, and I have sold out. It was the only resource left me for paying my debts, in fact, since you had sworn never to pay them again."

"Your debts! Do you mean to say that you were in debt again?"

"My dear Leonora, do you suppose that there is no such thing as growth in a tailor's bill? Do you imagine that one's tobacconist's account is not subject to the common laws of progression? I had a two years' accumulation of debt to wipe off—my creditors were becoming clamorous, judging by the number of lawyers' letters which I received but did not read—and my only way of making a clean slate was to sell my commission."

"It is shameful," exclaimed my lady, in a passion, "it is positively infamous! In spite of the two hundred a year I have allowed you!"

"That two hundred a year was only an incentive to extravagance. It afforded me occasional supplies of ready-money. Now I can do without ready-money. In short, the two hundred a year demoralized me."

Lady Talmash gave an impatient sigh. She rose from her seat, and began to pace up and down the shady patch of grass under the plane-tree, as it was her habit to do when unpleasantly excited. Julia Brading twisted the cord and tassels of her little silk apron, and looked at her uncle with a piteous expression of countenance, longing to make him an offer of her pocket-money, or to do something for his consolation. The Zoophyte was the only person unmoved—he stretched his long legs to their fullest extent upon a neighboring bench, dived into the pocket of his light overcoat, and produced therefrom a splendid seal-skin cigar-case, almost big enough for a small portmanteau. Everything appertaining to the Zoophyte was upon a large scale, and splendid in color and texture.

"You don't mind smoke out of doors, I know, Nora," he said, blandly, and began to puff away at an enormous Rio Hondo cigar.

His sister did not even condescend to notice the inquiry.

"What is to become of you?" she exclaimed at last, "that is the question—what is to become of you?"

"My dearest Leonora, I think that is a question that may fairly be relegated to the remote future. I am naturally a cautious man, and am not in a hurry to make any desperate plunge in life. In the meantime, I can live with you—there is no objection to that, I suppose?"

"Of course not, uncle Regy," cried Julia; "you can live with us. He can live with us for ever and ever, can't he, mamma? You know how I was wishing for him only yesterday."

"My darling Julia, you are a child, and don't know what you are talking about. So far as this place goes, there are your uncle's rooms, and he will always be welcome to occupy them, as long as he pleases. But at his age a man must do something and be something. It's preposterous to suppose that he can go on dawdling the rest of his life away here."

The Zoophyte yawned, and murmured that, in his opinion, no man ought to be expected to work after he was nine-and-

twenty. Mr. Ravenscroft's nine-and-twentieth birthday had just gone by.

The end of it all was, that he stopped at Brading Park, and strolled in the hothouses and ate ripe peaches, and played billiards with his niece. A wagon-load of chests and portmanteaus came from the railway station, and from these receptacles the Zoophyte produced the greatest marvels in the way of dressing-gowns and morning-coats and waistcoats and cravats that had ever been seen at Brading, to say nothing of a whole arsenal of meerschaum pipes, and a dainty little library of light French literature, with which, and with numerous splendid despatch-boxes, dressing-cases, photograph-albums, perfume-cabinets, and tobacco-chests, he beautified and adorned his rooms—making them so comfortable, in fact, that it was hard to imagine he would ever be able to tear himself away from them.

CHAPTER III.

Captain Ravenscroft—the rule, once a captain always a captain, was allowed to hold good in his case—Captain Ravenscroft had been a year at Brading Park, and he had as yet made no attempt at a new beginning in life. Sometimes, when his sister questioned him upon the subject, he told her that he was thinking it over, or that he was looking about him; but nothing came either of his thinking or his looking. There he was, placid and even-tempered to an extreme degree, the idol of the servants, the delight of Lady Talmash Brading's visitors, but nevertheless an encumbrance and responsibility to the lady herself.

Again and again she returned to the charge. Could he not do something—at the Bar, for instance? But the Zoophyte told her, with one of his lazily expressive shrugs, that by the time he had got through the preliminary business of the Bar, he would be quite an old man. There was commerce, then, suggested Lady Talmash Brading—the scions of many noble fami-

ies had entered the commercial arena lately. Could he not do something in sugar-broking, or shipbuilding, or something of that kind?

The Zoophyte pondered, and thought that he might perhaps travel in coals—there was not much commercial genius required for travelling in coals—Lady Talmash Brading gave a little shriek of horror.

"Travelling in coals! Upon my word, Reginald, you are incorrigible."

"Then, if you are tired of me, let me marry Miss Corks," said the Zoophyte; "she's a very nice girl, and I really think she'd have me."

"Marry Miss Corks, by all means," cried his sister indignantly; "but please consider yourself a stranger to me from the hour of your marriage."

"O, as far as that goes," replied the Zoophyte coolly, "I don't suppose Miss Corks would have me unless you did the civil; a girl with a hundred thousand pounds won't enter a family to be despised—it isn't likely."

"And it isn't likely that I shall receive a brewer's daughter, whose grandfather was a servant in this house!" returned Lady Talmash Brading.

"I suppose not; but it's rather hard upon me," said the Zoo, with a faint moan; "she really is a very nice girl."

Mary Corks certainly was a nice girl, and a pretty girl into the bargain—a girl with frank innocent blue eyes, a pert little nose, slightly *retroussée*, a perfect rosebud of a mouth, and all manner of artless winning ways that had gone straight home to the Zoophyte's heart. He *had* a heart, listless and inane as he seemed, and Mary Corks reigned therein. She had been very well educated, and, although her father and mother did make sad havoc of the Queen's English, was quite a lady: a good dutiful daughter too, fond and respectful in her demeanor towards the simple elderly people, and never ashamed of their shortcomings.

Yes, she was a dear little English maiden, and the Zoophyte

was very fond of her. He had met her at subscription balls in Brading, and had danced with her a conspicuous number of times; he had ridden his quiet hack to covert, and seen her in her dark-blue riding habit and coquettish hat with a scarlet feather. He had scraped acquaintance with old Corks one market-day—Corks had a profound reverence for the Talmash Brading family—and had been invited to dine at the big brand-new red-brick villa just outside Brading; a pile of building of the gothic order, with library and billiard-room, smoking-room, and conservatories jutting out from the main edifice, and a quadrangular mass of stabling that was like a baronial castle.

Mr. Corks himself inhabited a certain cosy little chamber which looked on the poultry-yard—a room that had been intended for the housekeeper, and then discarded as too small. Here the great brewer spent the best part of his life, smoking his clay-pipe, or studying his banker's-book, or reading the newspapers, in a pleasant solitude. He called the room the Snuggery, and whenever Mary Corks had a favor to ask, she used to repair to this chamber.

Captain Ravenscroft dined a great many times at the Battlements—Mr. Corks' gothic villa was called the Battlements—and he heard Mary sing and play, and played billiards with her after dinner in the great gothic billiard-room, with its big brass lamps, and open oak roof, and generally ecclesiastic appearance. Sometimes there was a party, consisting of professional people from Brading, with a sprinkling of the smaller country gentry; sometimes there was no one; but there was always an excellent dinner and first-rate wines, and the Zoophyte liked the quiet homely evenings best. He didn't mind Mr. Corks' idiomatic English a bit. He thought Corks a hearty honest old fellow, and really liked him.

"I wish I had a fortune," he said to himself sometimes despondently; "I shall seem such a mercenary scoundrel if I propose to that girl."

He did, however, propose to her. It wasn't possible to go on very long in her society and not tell her how much he loved

her. Those winning ways of hers quite knocked him over, to use his own expression. So one evening in the billiard-room he was taken off his guard, somehow, and before he knew what he was doing, he had asked her to be his wife.

He had to press the question a little before he could get any decisive answer. At first she would only trifle with the billiard-balls with downcast eyes, evading all his questions; but at last she confessed that he was not quite indifferent to her—that she liked him just a little—well, more than a little—that she loved him very much.

"But there is papa to be thought of," she said, looking up at him shyly with her pretty blue eyes. "I don't think he'd ever consent; in fact, I'm sure he wouldn't, unless——"

"Unless what, Darling?" (The Zoophyte had his arm round her waist by this time, and was looking down at the fair young face with an air of proprietorship.) "Unless what, dearest?"

"Unless Lady Talmash Brading were to use her influence with him. Papa has such a high opinion of her; and perhaps if he thought she wished it very much, he might give way."

The Zoophyte looked very blank for a moment, but it was only for a moment.

"She shall use her influence, Mary," he cried resolutely. He felt quite desperate—felt as if he could drag his sister to the Battlements by main force, and make her sue to Mr. Corks; anything rather than lose this dear girl, who was looking at him so confidingly.

"Am I to tell papa?" she faltered presently.

"Well, yes, darling. It's best to be all fair and above-board. Tell papa at once; and I'll tell my sister, and we'll see what she can do."

He was not very hopeful, but still he thought his sister could never be so atrociously cruel as to stand between him and a hundred thousand pounds. It seemed incredible.

But when he came to make his appeal, he found her obdurate. The idea of such an alliance was not to be tolerated for a moment.

"*I* use my influence to promote the match?" she exclaimed. "*I* stoop to that vulgar brewer! you must be demented to think of such a thing, Reginald. People who have risen from nothing, at my very door—a girl whose grandfather was a servant!"

"She can't help that, you see, Nora; and she's a perfect lady, I give you my honor—as much a lady as Julia."

Lady Talmash Brading gave a shriek.

"Yes; and my poor precious Julia is to go through life with the disgrace of a brewery tacked to her name—is to make her entrance into the great world associated with BEER!"

"What nonsense, Leonora! As if my wife's connections need affect Julia! All you have to do is to be civil to old Corks, and tell him you'll be glad to welcome his daughter as a member of your family. That kind of man sets such value upon rank, you'll be able to wind him round your finger. And she really is the dearest girl in the world, Nora."

"It is not to be heard of!" exclaimed the lady decisively.

A day or two after this, Captain Ravenscroft received another invitation to dine at the Battlements. He opined that this meant business, and made his appearance there in some trepidation. The dinner went off pleasantly enough. Mary was very silent, and blushed a great deal, without adequate provocation, but looked her prettiest. After dinner the Zoophyte would fain have strolled off to the conservatories or the billiard-room, according to his usual custom, but Mr. Corks stopped him.

"I should like a word or two with you in my room, Captain," he said, in a very friendly tone. "Johnson, take a bottle of Lafitte to the Snuggery."

The butler obeyed, and led the way, carrying a massive silver salver, with the claret and two clear bell-shaped glasses. It was a summer evening, and the Snuggery was warm, not to say stuffy. Even the open window only admitted an odor of live poultry; but the Zoophyte didn't mind this. He felt that his future was at stake.

"Take some of that there claret," said the brewer. "It's a better sort than I usually give you, though I don't give you bad. But I thought you should have the best to-night," he added, with a chuckle.

They filled their glasses. The brewer drained his at a draught; the Zoophyte sipped his wine in silence. He was very nervous.

"My little girl has been a-telling of me something," Mr. Corks began,—"something about you. Now, I want to know first and foremost, are you in earnest?"

"Thoroughly in earnest—with all my heart and soul," replied the Zoophyte, with unwonted energy.

"And it ain't her money you're after, hay?" asked the brewer. "You like my little gal for her own sake?"

"I love her so dearly, that I would marry her to-morrow if she hadn't a penny."

"That's all very fine. But how would you keep her if she hadn't a penny, I should like to know? However, luckily, she'll have plenty. I can give her a handsome fortune without feeling the loss of the money. And I don't care about her marrying a rich man. I'm not the sort of fellow that wants to join money to money. My father spent his life among the nobility, and he taught me a respect for rank. Money's a very good thing in its way, but it's all the better when it's joined to rank. Now all other points being agreeable, I shouldn't mind my daughter being sister-in-law to Lady Talmash Brading. It would sound well—'My sister, Lady Talmash Brading,' hay? You see, I'm a candid sort of a chap, and don't make any concealment of my feelings.'

Captain Ravenscroft bowed. It seemed pretty smooth sailing so far; but there were rocks and shoals ahead, no doubt.

"Now the question is," said the brewer, "does your sister know of this?"

"She does," replied the Zoophyte, gravely.

"And does she approve of it?"

The Zoophyte hesitated.

"I have no doubt that she will approve ultimately," he said. "She cannot fail to approve."

"Cannot fail to fiddlestick!" cried Mr. Corks, impatiently. "I'm not a-going to let my girl marry into a grand family that will turn their noses up at her. If you expect to get my Mary, and my Mary's money, her ladyship must come here to me, and let me know that her heart goes with the business, and that she'll be a sister to my girl. There must be no shilly-shally about *that*. And now, Captain Ravenscroft, what may be the income upon which you intend to begin housekeeping?"

The Zoophyte was fain to confess that all his worldly wealth consisted of the two hundred per annum which his sister allowed him.

"Well, upon my word, you're a cool customer!" cried the brewer, with a good-natured laugh that was very re-assuring. "However, I'll tell you what I'll do with you. Let your sister allow you five hundred a year, and settle it upon you, so as she can't change her mind—it won't be much, but it'll be something—and I'll give my girl fifty thousand down on the nail; settled upon herself and her children after her, of course."

"Of course," replied the Zoophyte.

"And let Lady Talmash Brading come to me in a friendly way, and talk the business over. I don't want no hole-and-corner work. If my Mary enters a high family, she must enter it like a lady."

Captain Ravenscroft promised that his sister should do all that was needful. And again he had that desperate feeling, that he would *make* her bow the knee before this resolute brewer rather than lose such a girl as Mary.

He went home that night not elated but grave. He knew that his sister was an obstinate woman, and that he had a difficult task before him. Early next morning he presented himself in her favorite room—a spacious sunny bow-windowed apartment, looking out upon the flower-garden. He presented himself before her, and stated his requirements in a business-like manner. It was a matter of life or death to him, he said

finally. He would be a blighted man if he did not marry Mary Corks.

His eloquence was all wasted. Lady Talmash was obdurate. It was not the five hundred per annum, though the request was certainly a cool one. She might have strained a point to give him that, had he been about to make an appropriate marriage; but she would never receive Mary Corks. She would never degrade herself in the sight of the county by alliance with that upstart brewer. She was very angry, as she was wont to be when the Corks question was mooted, and she said a great deal.

The Zoophyte heard her with his usual placidity. Even a matter of life and death could not goad him into the display of much emotion. The interview was a long one, and he used the strongest arguments he could think of; but to the end he was mild and tranquil. At the very last he said:

"Is that final, Leonora?"

"Quite final."

"Then I may as well wish you good-bye. I shall leave the Park this afternoon."

Lady Talmash looked surprised.

"There is no occasion for that," she exclaimed. "I have no quarrel with you, Reginald. I am only inflexible upon the subject of Miss Corks. There is no occasion for you to go away."

"I beg your pardon, my dear Leonora. You have often reproached me with my want of energy—my disinclination to enter upon a new career. I begin to feel that your reproaches were well founded, and I have made my plans for placing myself in a position to earn my own living."

"Indeed, you surprise me, Reginald. This is rather a new idea, is it not?"

"Well, yes; it is rather a new idea," answered the Zoophyte calmly.

"And what line have you chosen? Anything in the commercial way?"

"Yes; the business is commercial."

"Nothing horrid, I hope," cried Lady Talmash, with an

alarmed look. "Not travelling in coals, or anything of that kind?"

"Oh, no; there's no travelling—it's quite a stationary business, and clean. I really think I shall like it."

"You are very mysterious, Regy; you might just as well tell me frankly what you are going to do."

"I'll tell you all about it, if I succeed. In any case, you must take it as a compliment that I am anxious to follow your advice."

"I suppose so; but I should like to have been more in your confidence. However, I daresay it's all right. At any rate, I can tolerate anything sooner than your marrying Miss Corks."

The Zoophyte smiled—it was scarcely a smiling matter, but he decidedly smiled.

"I'm sorry you're so prejudiced on that point," he said. "Good-bye."

"Your going up to town by the next train?"

"Well, no, not by the next—I'm going away very soon, though. You don't mind my leaving the bulk of my luggage here, do you, Nora?"

"Of course not. You can consider those rooms always your own."

They shook hands, kissed each other even, a display of affection to which they were not particularly given, and parted. Captain Ravenscroft packed a portmanteau and carpet-bag, and carried them away with him in a Brading fly. He declined to avail himself of the Park stables for his exodus, and the Park servants said there had been a quarrel between the Captain and his sister.

"I don't know about that," said one of the housemaids; "I was cleaning the yellow room all the time they was a-talking in my lady's morning room, and I didn't hear high words between 'em."

"You'd never hear high words from the Captain," answered the housekeeper; "it isn't in him. But take my word for it,

there's been a quarrel, or the Captain wouldn't be going away all of a sudden like this."

The Zoophyte contrived to evade any farewell between himself and Julia.

He was tender-hearted upon some subjects, and his niece was one of them.

CHAPTER IV.

For a fortnight Lady Talmash Brading heard nothing of her brother. In the depths of her heart she was glad that he was gone, though she dared not own as much to Julia, who sorely bemoaned uncle Regy's departure. The Corks affair was off; that was the grand point in the mind of Lady Talmash. She was not very well during that fortnight—had a slight attack of summer influenza, or hay fever, and took numerous mild sedatives and saline draughts furnished by the most courteous and sympathetic of provincial doctors. She was a prisoner in the house, therefore, and Julia stayed at home with her, and was not to be lured away by the brightest days. Towards the end of the fortnight Lady Talmash surprised her own maid looking at her once or twice in a curious way, as if there was some revelation she would like to make if she dared. The housekeeper, too, had a peculiar manner one morning when she held a conference with her mistress. Once, too, Lady Talmash actually saw the butler—the grave elderly butler, who looked like a pillar of the state in his respectable solemnity—exchange a subdued grin with his subordinate, as if their minds were burdened with some common joke. The subordinate—as inferior in breeding to his chief—even gave a suppressed chuckle and splutter, and was fain to busy himself suddenly at the side-board in order to hide his guilty countenance from Lady Talmash Brading's majesty.

"Some vulgar village joke, no doubt," she thought; "but if that man laughs again, he must go."

At last her ladyship was pronounced well enough to go out. She took longer to get well, of course, than a common person,

and the Brading surgeon was as punctilious and solemn as if she had been at death's door.

"You really might take an airing in your pony-carriage, my lady;" and then he added in a strange downcast way, "but I wouldn't go far, I wouldn't expose myself to fatigue or worry just yet. A drive in the park, now, would be best."

"I hate prowling about the park," my lady answered impatiently. "If I go out at all, I shall go for a long drive. A park ought to be twenty miles round at least for it to be tolerable to drive in.—Julia, put on your hat, and tell Perkins to bring me my things."

The Brading practitioner dared not remonstrate; he murmured something about "care," and not staying out too long for the first time; and then took his polite departure. As he was crossing the hall, and afterwards in his carriage, he indulged in a suppressed chuckle, very much like the under-butler's.

"It's to be hoped she won't drive into Brading," he said to himself; "if she does, there'll be the devil to pay."

Lady Talmash did drive into Brading. She took a pleasant country round first, through green lanes where the dog-roses were in their glory, and then came homewards through Brading High-street. It was a pleasant gay-looking street enough, with old gable ends, and latticed windows in the upper stories, and here and there a house decorated with elaborate wood-work carved into heraldic devices—a house that had been occupied by some notable citizen in days gone by.

Half way down, the street opened out into a wide square market-place, with a piazza and clock-tower in the centre; and just here there was a sharp corner, where the pavement was narrow and the shop-fronts seemed to butt out upon the road in a rather aggressive manner. When Lady Talmash Brading's pony-carriage came to this point, Julia, whose quick eyes roamed everywhere, gave a little cry of surprise.

"Look, mamma!" she exclaimed; "there's a new pork-shop, such a nice one."

"Julia, I wish you would not call out in that way—about new pork-shops, too—it's so absurd."

There was a heavy waggon in front of them just at this moment, and Lady Talmash was fain to rein in her eager ponies. She had leisure to look listlessly up at the shop.

It was a pork-butcher's, with tender young piglings hanging before the window, and sausages in dainty-looking baskets inside—a most attractive-looking pork-butcher's—and on the board above the window was painted in conspicuous characters the name of REGINALD RAVENSCROFT.

"Yes, it was there! It was not a diabolical delusion, like the cat and the skeleton and the gentleman usher in Sir Walter Scott's Demonology—it was not an awful dream. The inscription was there—"REGINALD RAVENSCROFT, PORK-BUTCHER." And hanging in the windows there were placards announcing "Dairy-fed Pork," "Fine Cambridge Sausages fresh daily;" and so on.

Lady Talmash flung the reins to her daughter and sprang out of the carriage. She who had never before entered a provision shop of less distinction than Morel's or Fortnum and Mason's walked straight through the narrow doorway of the pork butcher's, her silken skirts actually brushing against a little tin tray of mysterious edible lumps, simmering in grease, and labelled "Ducks, a penny each."

My lady saw the ducks, and shuddered. They diffused a savory odor of sage-and-onion, and on the counter inside there was a large roasted leg of pork, with accompaniments.

It was market-day, and Reginald Ravenscourt, pork-butcher, was not above turning an honest penny by the sale of a cooked joint. The smell of the shop made Lady Talmash feel very faint, but she could not turn any paler than she was when she entered it. She had been white with anger when she stepped out of her pony-carriage.

Reginald Ravenscourt, pork-butcher, was standing behind his counter in a clean white apron, looking the very image of placid contentment.

"Pray, may I ask the meaning of this degrading absurdity?" demanded Lady Talmash in a voice that was tremulous with rage.

"Certainly, my dear Leonora. I am quite ready to explain my motives. You urged me to make a position for myself, and I ultimately resolved to do so. I did not feel that I had a genius for the higher walks of commerce, but I did consider myself a good judge of pork. This shop was to let, and people hereabouts told me a pork-butcher's was wanted. And I must say that the business has been remarkably brisk since I opened the place last week. Those ducks, now, in the tin at the door —they're the things Londoners call fagots—you've no idea how they go off at a penny; and there's a profit upon them, though you'd hardly believe it. Have a duck; let me get you a clean plate, and try a duck. They're uncommonly savory. I make them myself."

Lady Talmash did not deign to notice this polite offer. Two stalwart country fellows came in at this moment, and bought some roast pork. It was a pleasant sight to see the Zoophyte slicing the leg, not forgetting the stuffing and the gravy, and giving change for half-a-crown with a thoroughly business-like air. When the men were gone, Lady Talmash returned to the charge.

"Now, Reginald," she began sternly, "will you be good enough to explain?"

"My dearest creature, I *have* explained," he answered in his blandest manner. "What more can I say? It was necessary that I should do something, and this business suits me. You can't imagine what an endearing animal a pig is, considered as dairy-fed pork. As bacon he's large and uninteresting—runs into rashers, and becomes monotonous; but there's a really artistic pleasure in cutting up such pork as that," said the Zoophyte, patting a pink-looking loin. "And then there's the sucking-pig—see what a variety he imparts to the business."

"Is this meant for a joke, Reginald? If so, it is a most contemptible one."

"A joke!—not at all. I was never more serious in my life. You prevented my marriage with the dearest little girl in the world, who would have brought me fifty thousand pounds; and you upbraided me on the subject of my disinclination to get my own living. It was time I should do something. I am sorry your repugnance to the beer trade extends to the pig trade also."

"O, I see," said my lady indignantly, "this is an act of revenge."

"I won't admit that, Leonora; but it is an act of self-assertion. You wouldn't let me marry Mary Corks, so I have taken to pork as a consolation."

"I will allow you five hundred a year," said Lady Talmash impetuously—"settle it upon you—if you'll abandon this most degrading course."

"Thanks; this is a very generous offer, but I really would rather rely upon my own exertions, and pigs. You see, I have only just discovered that I can get my own living."

Lady Talmash argued and protested, but it was no use. The Zoophyte, after his own tranquil fashion, was as firm as a rock. He was really attached to the pork trade, he repeated, with a calm persistence that was exasperating to the last degree.

Her ladyship drove home in dead silence. Even the much-indulged Julia dared not question her. Her countenance was too awful. For a week she did nothing: but day and night she was pursued by the image of her brother Reginald Ravenscroft selling pork to the commonalty of Brading. The late captain of the Queen's Own Trumpeters, in shirt-sleeves and a white apron, cutting up pigs!

After enduring this for a week, Lady Talmash found that she could bear it no longer. She must do something, anything, to put an end to the unspeakable humiliation. She ordered her carriage and drove to Brading High-street, and went once more into the neat little pork-shop, past the tray of "Ducks a penny each."

The Zoophyte was behind his counter, in snow-white shirt-sleeves and spotless apron.

She could only use the same arguments that she had employed before. She was willing to allow him five hundred a year—six—seven—eight hundred even, if he would abandon that degrading employment.

The Zoophyte shrugged his shoulders.

"Bring Mary Corks here, and let her ask me to give up the business," he said decisively. "There is no one else who could wean me from pigs."

"What, humiliate myself to those Corks people, after all I have said?" cried Lady Talmash.

"Either that or endure my connection with pork. I really can't see it's any discredit to you. It's a very clean business."

Lady Talmash was vanquished. It was a hard thing to bow the knee, as it were, to Mr. Corks the brewer; but anything was preferable to this pork business, this open scandal, which of course had set all Brading talking about her, and had provoked her very menials to audacious grinning in her superb presence. She told her coachman to drive straight to the Battlements; and half an hour after her interview with the Zoophyte she was seated in the gorgeous new drawing-room, where all the furniture looked as if it had just come out of the upholsterer's shop, talking to Mr. and Mrs. Corks.

She could be very charming when she chose, and the brewer and his wife yielded immediately to her fascination. She was candor itself—told them frankly of her prejudice against trade, and the unworthy means that Captain Ravenscroft had taken to break through it.

"It is a rum start, certainly," said Mr. Corks, "and there's been a deal of talk about it."

Lady Talmash shivered a little—that she should ever seek a matrimonial alliance with a family whose head talked of "a rum start!"—but the image of the pork-butcher's shop was in her mind, and she smiled one of her sweetest smiles.

"We must get him to abandon this folly, Mr. Corks," she said: "now I know that your pretty daughter has more influence with him than any one else; she must persuade him to

give up pork-butchering, and when they are married I will settle five or six hundred a year upon him."

"And you'll receive my girl as a member of your family, hay, my lady? You won't go and turn your back upon her directly she's married?"

"No, Mr. Corks, I am not capable of that. If your daughter marries my brother with my approval, I shall treat her as a sister."

"Then it's a bargain, my lady," cried Corks. "Mary's desperate fond of the Captain, and she shall have him. I said I wouldn't consent to the match unless you was agreeable to it, and I have kept my word. But the girl's been going on anyhow, and has talked about that pork-butcher's shop as if it was the greatest thing that was ever done—like going aboard a lifeboat, or heading a forlorn hope, or summat o' that sort."

Miss Corks came into the room presently, looking so blooming and so pretty, and behaving with such perfect propriety, that Lady Talmash could not help being pleased with her. She bore the girl off in her carriage at once, and drove back to the pork-shop, where there was a brief and animated little scene performed between the Zoophyte and the two ladies.

The shutters went up that afternoon, and the name of Reginald Ravenscroft was painted out upon the space above them. Captain Ravenscroft and Miss Corks were married six weeks afterwards. Mary has been presented at Court by her sister-in-law, and Brading Park and the Battlements have exchanged dinners, much to the delight of Mr. and Mrs. Corks. The Captain has furnished a dear little house in Mayfair, where he lives very happily with his pretty young wife and the society he likes, running down to Brading occasionally, to be received with all honor at the Battlements or the Park. The pork-butcher business will be remembered at Brading to the end of time; but it is popularly supposed the Captain did the thing for a wager.

THREE TIMES.

CHAPTER I.

THE FIRST TIME.

OSITIVELY the last night of Herr Rudolph Prusinowski and the performing lions! Positively the last night! For the benefit of Herr Rudolph Prusinowski. Under the distinguished patronage of their Majesties Queen Victoria, the Emperor of China, the Cham of Tartary, his Serene Highness the Grand Duke of Baden, Simeon Muddlebrain, Esq., M.P., the Mayor and Corporation of Spindlecum, and other august personages too numerous to mention. Come early! Positively the last time. Come and see the lions. Herr Rudolph Prusinowski, the favorite of crowned heads and the élite of Europe. Take notice! The great Prusinowski has had the honor of performing before the Mikado of Japan. The world-renowned Prusinowski has been decorated with the order of Rouge et Noir by the Grand Duchess of Selzerwasserburg. Don't miss the lions!"

The above sentences, and many others of the same character—in which a picturesque fancy, aided by the experience of a public career, trifled with the sobrieties of fact and tripped lightly across the borderland of fiction—appeared in gigantic black letters upon a yellow poster on the side wall of the Queen's Theatre, Spindlecum, and in the streets and market-

place, upon the quays, and in the back slums of the same town. Spindlecum was a large manufacturing town—a town that did a good deal of business in the export way, and had much commerce by land and sea; and Spindlecum could boast of two theatres: the Royal, an elegantly-appointed edifice in a side-street off the quay, with a stone portico surmounted by a bust of Shakespeare; a house about which elderly inhabitants of Spindlecum cherished traditions of Edmund Kean, and where Macready and Harley were remembered as stock actors, but a house which had never paid a manager within the memory of man; and the Queen's, a vast barn-like building, with a lofty roof supported by iron girders, three tiers of boxes, and Alpine heights in the way of galleries, which, contemplated from the broad valley of the pit, seemed inaccessible to the foot of man. The Queen's was making a fortune for its managers. There was a sixpenny pit, and there was a threepenny gallery, whereby the house was never empty, and on Mondays and Saturdays overflowed with noisy human life. The audience at the Queen's was critical, but on the whole good-natured; requiring plenty of life and movement in the pieces, and what may be called showy action in the performers. The Queen's liked stars, and was tolerably universal in its appreciation of these luminaries; this week clamorous in their applause of some stalwart Othello or loud-voiced Hamlet, next week gaping entranced upon the contortions of a family of acrobats; now crowding to see Mr. Reginald Montmorency and his celebrated mare Black Bess in the grand spectacular drama of *Dick Turpin, or the Ride to York*, anon rushing to behold Signor Poloni and his striped Zebra of the Prairie.

A man with a pale sallow face, blue chin, and close-cut hair sat in a lounging attitude upon a low wall opposite the stage-door of the Queen's, smoking a meditative pipe, and contemplating the big yellow poster with a dreamy fondness. He had a little group of satellites about him, also close-cropped, blue-chinned, and tobacco-consuming; minor lights in the dramatic heaven, the stock company of the Queen's, who were

thrown a little into the background by the lions, shuffling through a preliminary melodrama nightly, before an audience who beheld them with impatience, and heard them sometimes with derision, eager for the grand business of the evening.

"I think that ought to hit 'em up," said the Herr thoughtfully (he spoke excellent English for a foreigner, but seemed scarcely to have acquired the language in the most aristocratic or æsthetic circles). "The Mikado looks well, doesn't he?"

"First rate," replied Mr. de la Zouche, the walking gentleman. "Was he a nice kind of chap, the Mikado?"

Herr Prusinowski turned his contemplative eyes upon the inquirer with a look of placid scorn.

"You ain't so jolly green as to suppose I ever set eyes upon him," he said, knocking the ashes out of his pipe. "I was never in Japan in my life; never nearer than a japan candlestick. The Mikado is a safe card, he is; who's to ask any questions about *him?* And so's the Cham of Tartary; I always bring out them two for the last night. Queen Victoria's legitimate business. I did perform once before the royal servants, and got a fiver from the royal seckitary. That *is* immediate patronage."

"I expect you'll have a clipping house, cully," remarked Mr. Tiddikins, the low comedian, a small man with a falsetto voice.

"I look forward to it, Tiddikins; and if it goes over eighty, I'll stand a supper, mind that."

There was a subdued murmur of applause.

"Hot or cold?" inquired Mr. de la Zouche.

"Hot," replied the lion-tamer. "None of your cold fowls and 'am, your pastry and rubbish for me. A sirloin of beef at top, and a prime goose at bottom, a veal pie and a stewed steak at the sides, and plenty of smoking hot vegetables; a prime old stilton and a bowl of salad to wind up with, and as much champagne as you can swallow, with brandy-and-water to settle it on your stomachs. That's what I'll do, at the Lion and Lamb,

if the house goes over eighty when the half prices to the boxes is in."

This time the applause was louder.

"I always said you were a jolly good fellow, Bill," said Mr. Tiddikins, "and I don't care how often I say it again."

It is to be observed that Mr. Tiddikins addressed the distinguished Rudolph by the simpler cognomen Bill, one of the playful licenses of friendship, no doubt.

"It's wonderful how those animals draw," said Mr. de la Zouche thoughtfully, as if he were contemplating the feasibility of setting-up on his own account as a lion-tamer. "You've been here three seasons, Prusinowski, and, egad, the people ain't tired of 'em yet. They seem as eager as ever. One would suppose they liked to see a poor beggar hazard his life every night."

"There's something in that," replied the Herr. "If it wasn't for the danger, the wild-beast business would be as flat as ditch-water."

"Were you ever frightened?" asked the walking gentleman. "I know what a plucky fellow you are, and that you handle those three brutes as if they were so many tabby cats; but still sometimes, you know, a man's nerve must fail. Come, now, Prusinowski, were you never frightened?"

"Never but once," answered the lion-tamer, "and then I thought it was all over with me."

He grew suddenly grave, gloomy even, at the mere recollection waked by the walking gentleman's inquiry.

"Never but once," he repeated, "and God grant I never may be so again! When a man in my trade loses his head, it's all up with him."

"How did it happen old fellow?" asked Mr. Tiddikins.

Herr Prusinowski stopped to fill his pipe before answering the question. It was four o'clock upon a blazing July afternoon, rehearsal was over, her Majesty's servants of the Queen's Theatre, Spindlecum, had dined in the intervals of the day's work at their several lodgings, and had nothing particular to

do with themselves until tea-time. An actor of this class has generally a rooted aversion to going home.

"Well, you see," the lion-tamer began in a leisurely way, stopping to take a few preliminary whiffs after those three words of prelude, "I was at Manchester nigh upon five years ago, and it was my last night and my 'ben,' as it might be to-night." A pause and a few more puffs. "We was doing first-rate business, fizzing, and I don't think I was ever in such high spirits in my life. My pockets were stuffed with money that I'd been taking about the town for tickets, and I hadn't a place to let in my dress-circle.

"'Why, Bill,' says my little woman, when I kept running in and out of our lodgings between whiles at rehearsal— we was close agen the slum—taking her in a handful of money every time, 'you seem as if you was bewitched; I don't like to see you like that. I had a Scotch friend once as said it was a bad sign —a sign of something going to happen.'

"'Lord love your little foolish heart,' I answered, 'it's a sign of nothing, except that I'm going to have a screaming house to night. I don't suppose there'll be a corner you can screw yourself into if you want to see me.' For she's a rare one for going in front of a night, you know, is the missus."

Mr. de la Zouche and Mr. Tiddikins murmured their acquaintance with this domestic fact. Herr Prusinowski smoked his pipe for a minute or so, and then went on:

"'Why, there's the family box!' she said.

"That's a large private box on the opposite prompt, that don't often let, unless there's Italian Opera, or Charles Matthews, or something out of the common.

"'No, there ain't,' I answered, laughing.

"'What!' cried the missus, 'is that let too?'

"'Let this morning,' said I, 'and there's the money—three pound three—thirty-one-and-six of which comes to us.'

"For I had a half-share clear of expenses, same as here. Lizzie—that's my wife, you know—was quite proud to think I was going to have such a good box audience, for it isn't every

box audience as will take to wild beasts. You may get schools and pious people, that object to the drama, but consider a man putting his head into a lion's mouth improving—there's quite a run upon lions in the Scriptures—but as a rule, your boxes are shady. So my Liz was proud of my dress-circle that night.

"'I wonder whether it's the mayor and his family,' she said, speculating about that big private box.

"'No,' I told her, 'it's a gentleman and a stranger, no name.'

"Well, the night came, a sweltering hot summer evening, such as it will be to-night. The performances began with one of your talkee-talkee genteel comedies, and the house was so full and noisy the actors couldn't hear themselves speak. They got through it somehow, there was a short overture, and then the curtain went up for my performance. The three lions discovered in a forest, to slow music, which gets a round for *them*, and gives me my entrance and reception.

"You know the beasts, they were the same three I've got now —Brown, Jones, and Robinson. Old Brown's a harmless old chap enough, not a sound tooth in his head, and no more harm in him than in an elderly jackass; Jones is a deep old dodger, but there isn't *much* harm in him; but Robinson's a nasty-tempered beast, a brute you never can be sure of, an animal that will lick your hand one minute, and be ready to snap your head off the next.

"Well, I got a first-rate reception; I thought the gallery would have never left off applauding; and the sight of the house, crammed to the ceiling, made me almost giddy. Perhaps it was the heat of the place, which was like an oven; perhaps, as I'd been standing treat or been stood for off and on pretty well all day, I may have taken a little more than was good for me; anyhow, I felt the house spinning round me, just as if I'd been some duffer of a novice, instead of the old stager I am.

"I looked at the family box O.P., curious to see who'd taken it. There was only one gentleman there, a man of fifty or thereabouts, with a cadaverous lantern-jawed face, and light reddish hair, very straight, combed neatly on each side of his forehead.

He was dressed in black, regular evening dress, white choker and all complete, and, do you know, the instant I set eyes upon that man, he gave me a turn."

"That was a queer fancy," said Mr. de la Zouche, helping himself to tobacco from the Herr's guttapercha pouch, which lay open on the wall.

"Perhaps it was; but if that night was to come over again, I should have the fancy over again," replied Prusinowski. "It was partly his own looks, I think, partly the way he looked at me; not like the rest of the audience, all good nature, expecting to be amused, but with a steadfast ravenous kind of look, that made my blood run cold. 'That's a man who'd like to see something happen to me,' I said to myself.

"I didn't give way to the fancy all at once. I began the performance; but I stole a glance at my sandy-haired pale-faced gentleman now and then, and always found him looking at me in the same way. He had large light-gray eyes, very light, and very prominent. I can see them now, and they followed every move I made, like a cat's following a mouse. He never moved his eyes from me, he never smiled, he never applauded; he sat in a half-crouching attitude, leaning over the front of the box, watching me, and he made me feel as if I had a ton weight tied to each of my legs. Everything went well for some time, though I felt I'd never done things worse. Brown and Jones behaved beautifully; but just towards the last, when I had to put my head into Robinson's mouth to bring down the curtain, I saw that the brute was in one of his nasty tempers. I suppose the heat had put him out—I know the perspiration was pouring down my face—or perhaps *he* didn't like the look of that cadaverous gentleman in the private box. Anyhow, he turned nasty, and when I wanted to collar him he bounced away from me.

"The house turned as still as death all in a moment, and I could see the audience was frightened. I gave a look at my gentleman in the box. He was leaning a little farther over the cushion, with something like a smile on his face. Such a smile.

I could fancy any one going to see a man hung smiling like that.

"'Bray to not pe vrightened, laties and shentlemens,' I said in my broken English (old Sauerkraut, the ophecleid at the Lane, taught me that dodge), 'id is nozing. Te peast vill to all I veesh;' and then I gave Robinson a pretty smart cuff, and began to drag his jaws open.

"The brute snarled, turned upon me, and in the next instant would have had his teeth in my shoulder, if I hadn't given the signal for the curtain. Half-a dozen carpenters rushed upon the stage and helped me to tackle him. We had him safe in less than a minute; but just at that one moment, before the curtain dropped, it was as near as a toucher.

"There was a good deal of applause; not that I'd done anything to deserve it, for the business of putting my head in the brute's mouth was in the bill, and the audience had been swindled out of that; but they evidently knew I'd been in danger, and they called me before the curtain. I looked up at that white-faced devil in the private box. He was standing up, rubbing his hands in a satisfied kind of way, as if he had seen what he wanted to see; and as I passed just under him he said in a slow measured voice that gave me the shivers:

"'A narrow escape, Herr. Very well done indeed! I congratulate you.'

"I gave him a look, which he ought to have understood if he didn't, made my bow to the house, and went off the stage. Robinson was quiet enough by this time. My man Joe Purdy had walked him off to his box, and there he was growling over his shin-bones, as mild a lion as you'd wish to see. 'Only let me get you safe back to London, my friend,' says I, 'and I'll take you down to Jamrack's and swop you for something better tempered. Talent is all very well; but temper's worth all the talent in the world.' However, that's five years ago, and there's Robinson still performing with me. The brute has such a wonderful gift for his profession! and his heart and soul's in it too. Take that animal in the middle of the day, when he ain't par-

ticularly hungry, and he's a decent fellow enough; but come between him and his business, and you'll find out what a lion is. He's the vainest beast out, and cuts up rough if he don't get a round of applause for every trick he does. But, Lord bless you, there's no such thing as genius without vanity. He's been a fortune to me first and last, has that animal. Brown and Jones are nothing more than supers to him."

"You didn't see any more of your friend in the box?" inquired Mr. de la Zouche, who was not particularly interested in these praises of the gifted Robinson.

"Curse him, no! By the time I'd changed my clothes he had left the house. I went round to the box-office to see if the box-keepers could tell me anything about him. No; he was a stranger. He had taken his box that morning, finding there was no stall to be had, and paid his three guineas without a question.

"Now I daresay you'll think me an out-and-out fool when I tell you I couldn't sleep that night, nor many nights after, for thinking of that man. I couldn't get his pale cheeks and lank jaws and light gray eyes, with that horrid gloating look in them, out of my mind. 'That's a fellow who'd go to see a man hung,' I said to myself. 'That's a man who'd stand by to see his fellow-creatures hung, drawn, and quartered, and enjoy it—especially the drawing.' I hadn't a doubt in my mind that he was on the look-out for an accident all the evening; I hadn't a doubt in my mind that it was through him I made a mess of it at the end."

"Did you never see him again?" asked the low comedian.

"Never; God forbid I ever should, for I've a notion that if I did, it would be the death of me. I'm not a nervous man in a general way, nor superstitious either; but I'd give up the biggest haul I ever made by a benefit rather than act before that man."

"A queer notion," said the humorous Tiddikins.

"A very queer notion," echoed the gentlemanly De la Zouche.

He was not a fine actor, the walking gentleman belonging rather to that class of performer who is contemptuously likened to a stick, and his dramatic path had been by no means strewn with roses; yet he was fain to congratulate himself that it had not been beset by lions. He had been somewhat inclined to envy Rudolph Prusinowski the distinction and prosperity of his career; but just now it occurred to him that there were two sides to the picture. He rubbed his shoulder thoughtfully, and was glad to think that he was exposed to the assaults of no fiercer animals than those rampant tragedians who snubbed him when he played Horatio, and made light of him in Cassio, but who melted a little on their benefit nights, and treated him to beer.

CHAPTER II.

THE SECOND TIME.

THE Spindlecum people showed their appreciation of the British drama as represented by lion-taming by giving Herr Prusinowski a bumper. Whether it was the influence of the Cham of Tartary, or the Mikado, the Grand Duchess of Selzerwasserburg, or the local member, or the simple merits of the performance, is a moot question; but the Spindlecumians assembled in full force; and before the Herr had left the family tea-table to repair to the theatre, he received the pleasing intelligence that the crowd at the pit and gallery doors was half-way across the street.

"If we only go on like this for another year or so, Liz, I'll cut the profession," exclaimed Herr Prusinowski cheerily, "and start a theatrical public, somewhere on the Surrey side. It's a trying life is the wild beast business."

"And a dangerous life too, William," said the little woman, with a sigh.

(The renowned Rudolph's name in private life was William.)

"Not much of that, old girl. I'm more than a match for Robinson by this time. There isn't a move he's up to that I'm

not down upon; and he's the cunningest beast that ever picked a bone. You're going into the front to-night, eh, Liz?"

"O yes, I shall get a seat at the back of the boxes. Mrs. Prodger's going with me. She's took her ticket, and paid for it, you know, William, like a lady."

Mrs. Prodger was the Prusinowski's landlady, a ponderous matron of fifty, who had let lodgings to "theatricals" for the last twenty years.

"Ta-ta, Liz, then; I'm off."

"It's early, William. There's the *Miller and his Men*—that'll last an hour and a half, surely."

"I don't believe it'll play an hour. You ought to know what my benefit audiences are—all agog for the lions. I want to have a look at the beasts before I begin, and I'm always a little nervous on my ben. Good-bye."

This was a mere conjugal excuse. The theatre to a man bred at the side-scenes is his club. The Herr preferred smoking his pipe in the free-and easy atmosphere of the dressing-room at the Queen's to the tamer delights of the domestic tea-table. He had very little anxiety about his beasts. Joe Purdy, his factotum, a keeper who had served his apprenticeship with the great Wombwell, had the custody of them.

The house was an excellent one. The boxes were not so well filled as on that memorable night at Manchester, which Herr Prusinowski had described to his friends; but the pit was a seething caldron of humanity, the gallery looked like a wall of eager faces piled one upon the other up to the iron roof. The *Miller and his Men* was performed almost in dumb show, or seemed so to be, though the leading tragedian retained on the establishment was roaring himself hoarse in the character of Grindoff, with the faint hope of snatching a stray leaf from the crown of wild olive which would be cast at the feet of the lion-tamer by and by.

Grindoff did not bate a syllable of his part or the minutest detail of his stage business; not a stamp of his russet boot, or a

scowl of his heavily-corked eyebrows; but the rest of the company, less enthusiastic, scamped their work to the best of their abilities, and the drama was raced through in one hour ten minutes and seven seconds by the prompter's chronograph.

Then came a stirring overture—the "Bronze Horse"—during which the audience cracked nuts and became momentarily more excited; and then the act-drop rose to slow music of a soul-appalling character, and revealed Brown, Jones, and Robinson picturesquely grouped in the stock primeval forest.

There was a pause. The house applauded vociferously. There was a something stirring in the notion that these three unfettered beasts might leap into the pit at any moment. It was quite a pleasant sensation—especially for the gallery. Brown, who was elderly and decrepit, yawned and stretched himself out as if for slumber, with the air of having been untimely disturbed from his after-dinner nap. Jones, who was of a lively temperament, whisked his tail, and snapped at an imaginary fly. Robinson stared full at the audience, as if he really did understand and appreciate their plaudits.

The music quickened, broke into a stirring march, and then, at a fortissimo chord from the full orchestra, the lion-tamer bounded on to the stage—a striking figure, broad-shouldered and muscular, in close-fitting flesh-colored raiment, a scarlet girdle round his waist, and a leopard's skin over his shoulder.

There was a good strong Sheffield knife in his belt, but he had no appearance of being armed.

His reception was tremendous. He stood bowing and moving his lips in vague murmurs, with an air of being quite overcome by his feelings, for nearly five minutes before he could begin his performance. His eyes wandered all round the house with the gaze of calculation, till they grew suddenly fixed, glaring at the stalls.

Now the stalls at the Queen's Theatre, Spindlecum, were a delusion and a snare. Spindlecum at its best was not an aristocratic town, and the Queen's was not the aristocratic theatre of Spindlecum. Except on a Mayor's bespeak or under masonic

patronage, the stalls were rarely tenanted. But there they were, two long rows of partitioned seats, covered with dusty red cloth.

To-night there were three people in all the length and breadth of them—two faded-looking elderly women in opera-cloaks at one end, and in the middle, in a position that commanded every inch of the stage, a middle-aged man, with a cadaverous face, prominent light-gray eyes, and lank reddish hair, carefully dressed in full evening costume.

He sat in an attitude of extreme attention, with his arms folded on the back of the seat in front of him—he was in the back row—and his eyes fixed upon the lion-tamer. For the moment the sight of him seemed to turn Rudolph Prusinowski to stone. It was the man he had been talking of that day.

The cold sweat broke out upon his forehead; but he stamped his foot savagely, angry with himself for this folly, muttered an oath, and began his business with the lions—standing upon their backs, riding round the stage upon all three at once, leading them through a kind of dance movement, described in the bills as a set of quadrilles, with garlands of paper roses, and otherwise disporting himself with them, the red-haired man in the stalls watching his every movement and every movement of the animals breathlessly, and never stirring by a hair's-breadth from his attentive attitude, or turning his eyes away from the stage.

Then came the feature of the evening—a single combat between Herr Prusinowski and Robinson—who was described in the bills, by the way, as "Moloch, the Royal brindled lion, presented to Herr Prusinowski by one of the native princes of the Punjaub"—at the end of which the Herr dragged asunder the animal's jaws, and put his head into the red-hot-looking mouth.

To-night, in spite of that deadly terror which had come upon the Herr at the sight of that one detested spectator, everything went smoothly enough. Robinson, otherwise Moloch, kept his temper, suffered his jaws to be opened to their widest extent, and the tamer's head to repose upon his tongue as on a pillow for half-a-dozen seconds or so, and the curtain came down to

vociferous applause; but when the *bénéficiaire* was called for, there was no response. The prompter found him leaning against one of the wings, white to the lips.

"Did you ever see a man tremble?" he asked, in a voice that shook so much as to be scarcely intelligible. "If you want to see one, look at me."

He was shaking in every limb, like a man stricken with ague.

"Why, what's the matter, cully?" asked the prompter, with more friendliness of tone than elegance of diction. "They're calling for you like mad. You'd better go on."

"I'm going as soon as I can steady myself. I never neglect my business; but I've had a turn. I never thought I should come off the stage alive to-night."

"Why, the animals were quiet enough."

"Yes, as mild as lambs; but there's a man in front that's my evil genius. I never felt superstitious about anything else before—none of your ghosts or that kind of rot—but I've got my fancy about that man. He'd like to see me killed, and—he'll contrive to see it."

"Prusinowski," said the prompter, "I couldn't have believed it of you. I thought you was a man of sense."

But the prompter felt uncomfortable nevertheless. The human mind is especially open to uncomfortable sensations of this kind.

"Come, my boy," he exclaimed, "they're losing temper." This in allusion to the audience, who were clamoring hoarsely for their favorite. "You'd better go on."

Prusinowski wiped his damp forehead, pulled himself together, as it were.

"All right," he said, and followed the prompter to the first entrance, and went through the narrow opening which that functionary made for him by pulling the heavy drop-scene a little on one side. He went on, made his accustomed mechanical bow, and crossed the stage, to disappear with renewed bowings on the opposite side. He was looking at the stalls all the time.

The man was gone.

"Curse him!" muttered the lion-tamer. "If he'd given me

time to change my clothes, I'd have been in front of the house in time to see him come out. I want to know who he is; I want to know what he means."

He dressed hurriedly, tearing off his close-fitting garb, and shuffling on the costume of everyday life anyhow, and then went back to the prompt entrance before the curtain had risen for the farce, and took another survey of the stalls, thinking it just possible that his evil genius had returned. But the man's place was empty. There were only the two dreary women, waiting meekly for one of the stalest, inanest farces known to dramatic literature, and fanning themselves with their pocket-handkerchiefs.

Herr Prusinowski went round to the public doors of the theatre, and hung about there, with a vague idea that the man might be lingering also. There was a large tavern just opposite the Queen's, where the audience were wont to refresh themselves —even the stalls and boxes—with brandy-and-soda. The Herr crossed the road by and by, went into the crowded bar, still looking for his man, and looking vainly.

While he was staring about him a friendly hand tapped him on the shoulder.

"It was well over eighty, my boy," said the voice of De la Zouche, upon whose youthful cheek still lingered some trace of the vermilion it had worn in the *Miller and his Men*, and whose upper lip was still stiff with the glue that had secured his horse-hair moustache. "Nearer ninety, Tiddikins tells me, and he knows how to reckon up a house with any man in the profession. I wish you joy."

"Thank you, old fellow," replied the lion-tamer vaguely. "Yes, I think it's a good house."

"Think! There's no room for thinking. The perspiration was running down their faces in the pit all through the *Miller*. The house was like a furnace; and uncommonly thirsty that kind of thing makes a man. The pongelow you sent in was very acceptable. I thought Fitz Raymond would never have taken his head out of the pewter. He's awful coally on his Grindoff—

goes in a perisher, even when he can't hear himself speak for the noise in front. But I say, Prusi, how about the little supper you talked of?" This in an insinuating tone.

Prusinowski stared at him blankly for a moment, and then said carelessly,

"The supper—O, to be sure, I'd forgotten all about it." The noble countenance of De la Zouche fell, and his open brow was overshadowed by a sudden gloom. "But it's all right," continued the *bénéficiare*. "It's ordered for twelve o'clock sharp. I ordered it on spec. I thought I should have a good house."

"Prusinowski, you are a gentleman!" exclaimed the actor. "You are one of Nature's nobility, sir, and daily contact with the brute creation has not degraded your lofty mind. At twelve sharp. I'll go home and put on a clean collar. I think you mentioned a goose?"

"Roast beef at the top, roast goose at the bottom," said the Herr absently.

"It is a bird which, on the supper-table, I appreciate above any of the feathered tribe," replied the walking gentleman. "*Au reservoir.*"

He departed, wondering at the silence and gravity of a man who could draw an eighty-pound house.

Herr Prusinowski left the tavern and strolled listlessly along the street. It was not quite eleven. He had a clear hour before him, in which he could do what he pleased with himself. Under ordinary circumstances he might have gone home to have a few words with his "little woman," and make some amendment in his toilet; but to-night he hardly cared to face his wife. She would see that something was wrong, and question him. The impression that man's appearance had made upon him was a subject he did not want to talk about, not even with her. He turned out of the busy thoroughfare in which the Queen's Theatre was situated presently into a broad, quiet, old-fashioned-looking street leading down to the quay—a street of broad square red-brick houses of the Georgian era, grim and respectable, with a shop only here and there, and then a superior class of shop. It

was a very quiet street at this time of the night. The summer moon was shining full upon the broad pavement and empty road, and there was just a glimpse of moonlit water at the end o. the street where it opened on the quay.

There was only one shop open at this hour, a tobacconist's at a corner. Prusinowski felt in his coat-pocket with a dim recollection of having allowed Mr. Fitz Raymond to empty his tobacco-pouch that evening, and then strolled across the road towards the tobacconist's shop. While he was in the act of crossing, a man came out of the shop and walked slowly away towards the quay. The lion-tamer recognized him at a glance, and darted after him. It was the occupant of the stalls, a tall angular figure in the moonlight, with more or less the air of a gentleman.

It was an unjustifiable thing to do, of course; but Rudolph Prusinowski did not stop to consider the etiquette of the situation. He was resolved to accost the man. He would have done the same wherever he had met him.

"I beg your pardon," he said at the stranger's shoulder, "I believe you were in front to-night in the stalls at the Queen's?"

The man turned and faced him. It was not a prepossessing countenance by any means, that long cadaverous visage, with the pale prominent eyes and lank sandy hair. The moonlight made it look more than usually cadaverous.

"Yes," he said, "I have been at the Queen's Theatre this evening. Dear me! you are the lion-tamer, I believe. This is really curious!"

He spoke in a formal deliberate way that was strangely irritating to Herr Prusinowski's nerves. These artists—even professors of the lowest arts—are apt to be sensitive.

"You have some kind of business with me, Herr Prusinowski?" the stranger said interrogatively, the lion-tamer standing for the moment staring at him like a newly-awakened sleep-walker, utterly lost and helpless.

"I—I wanted to ask you a question," he said abruptly, rousing himself with an effort. "This isn't the first time I've

seen you. You took a private box at Manchester five years ago for my benefit."

"I did," replied the stranger. "I congratulate you on the possession of an excellent memory, Mr. Prusinowski. You had a narrow escape that night at Manchester, I imagine. One of your animals turned restive."

"Yes," said the lion-tamer moodily, "that brute Robinson cut up rough. I lost my nerve, and he saw it. It *was* a narrow escape—a disappointment for you, wasn't it?"

"Excuse me, I hardly catch your meaning."

"You thought it was all over with me, didn't you? Come now, I want to know your motive for coming to see me that time—I want to know your motive for coming to see me to-night."

"Motive?" repeated the stranger. "I should suppose the motive must be sufficiently obvious. People generally attend that sort of entertainment, and every sort of entertainment, in search of amusement."

"Other people, perhaps—not you. I know what a man's face means, and I watched yours, as close—well, almost as close as you watched me. It wasn't the face of a man that came to be amused."

"You seem to have a peculiar way of looking at things, Mr. Prusinowski," replied the stranger, rubbing his bony close-shaven chin thoughtfully. "However, to be candid with you, I am somewhat interested in lion-taming. I am an idle man, you see. My means enable me to live pretty much as I please and where I please, and a man without occupation is in a manner compelled to create an interest for himself in things outside his own life. I am an amateur of wild-beast shows. There was a man called Green—you have heard of him, perhaps. I saw that man Green perform seventeen consecutive times. I was peculiarly interested in him."

"Yes," said Prusinowski, "I know all about Green. He was killed—killed by a tiger that he'd made a good deal of money out of."

"He was," answered the stranger; "I saw it."

Herr Prusinowski shuddered.

"I thought so," he said; "I thought as much. You've tasted blood."

"Upon my honor, that is a very pleasant way of putting it," replied the stranger. "I look at these things entirely from an artistic point of view. I have heard it asserted that men of your profession always do meet with some fatal accident sooner or later. Since you push me so closely, I am bound to admit that has formed one element of interest for me in this kind of performance. I can understand the delight of the Roman people, from the emperor down to the humblest freedman, in their gladiatorial shows. I have a somewhat classical turn of mind, perhaps, and am proud to acknowledge a taste which connects me with a classic age."

"I don't understand half that palaver," said Herr Prusinowski rudely; "but I trust in God I may never see your face again."

"Really, now! but why?"

"Because you are a cold-blooded scoundrel, and you would like to see me killed."

"My dear Mr. Prusinowski, that is a style of language which, if I were an ill-tempered man, I might resent. Happily I am not an ill-tempered man, so let it pass. You have no right to remark that I should like to see you killed by one of those brutes of yours. But if you *are* destined to meet your death in that manner, which it is to be hoped you are not, I freely admit that I should wish to be a spectator of the catastrophe. It would not make the smallest difference to you, and it would be highly interesting to me. Is this your way? No? In that case, good-night."

He lifted his hat ceremoniously, and departed towards the patch of moonlit water at the end of the street, leaving the lion-tamer standing on the pavement, transfixed and brooding.

It was just as he had imagined—the man was an amateur of sudden death.

The supper at the Lion and Lamb public-house—a snug little hostelry five doors from the theatre, and much affected by the actors—was a gastronomic success, but not a social one. The fare was excellent. The giver of the feast ordered liquors on a liberal scale, and eatables and drinkables disappeared with a celerity cheering to witness. Yet the banquet was not a cheerful one. Nothing could rouse Prusinowski from the gloom that had fallen upon him. The actors did their utmost to beguile him into gayety, with boisterous talk and laughter, racy anecdotes, and an unlimited amount of that humorous converse commonly known as "chaff," to which the theatrical mind is especially prone; but all their efforts failed. Once or twice he did make some faint show of rallying—gave a smart answer or two, threw a lobster claw at the tragic and dignified Fitz Raymond when that great artist was engaged in argument, and pushed a stick of celery down the coat-collar of the absent-minded De la Zouche. But these were the feeblest spurts of gayety, and by degrees the talk fell flat, and the revels, which under happier auspices would have lasted far into the summer dawning, broke up abruptly at a quarter past two.

Mr. Warbeck the prompter walked home with Tiddikins and De la Zouche, and told them what had happened after the fall of the curtain.

"Prusinowski's as good a fellow as ever breathed," he said in conclusion, being thoroughly warmed through with gin-and-water. "If he was my own brother, I could not like him better than I do. But I'm afraid there's something queer hereabouts."

He tapped his forehead significantly.

"A loose slate," said Mr. Tiddikins.

"A bee in his bonnet," said Mr. de la Zouche.

CHAPTER III.

THE THIRD TIME.

It was three years later in the life of the lion-tamer, and he was performing for three nights only at a sea-coast town in the north of England, a dreary little place enough, whither he had strayed from the rich manufacturing districts where his harvests were wont to be so plenteous—a dismal little town, beside which the sea seemed to howl more dolefully than by other shores; a stony High-street, a damp windy fish-market, a beach of great loose pebbles, and a long wooden jetty stretching out to sea, and slippery always with slime and weed, dead fish, and other refuse of the great ocean.

Three years!—and yet on his benefit night at Spindlecum Herr Prusinowski had talked about retiring on his laurels in a year. He had not been doing badly either; prosperity had followed all his wanderings; but the human mind is elastic in its estimate of money, and Herr Prusinowski's notions of the fortune he ought to retire upon had widened with the passage of time.

"Another six months, little woman," he said, "and I'll sell the beasts by auction, and take a public-house," which was his notion of peace and retirement.

"I wish it was to be to-morrow, William," the little woman answered sadly. "I shall never know a happy moment till you've done with those animals."

The first two nights at Lowshore, this obscure northern seaport, had been tolerably successful. The theatre was the mouldiest old barn perhaps that had ever been dedicated to public entertainments, and was opened about once in two years for a week or so of transient splendor, when some wandering star of the dramatic firmament, more wildly speculative than his brethren, essayed his fortunes at Lowshore, and informed the nobility and gentry of the district that he was about to appear for six nights only in a round of favorite characters

Rarely as the doors of the temple were open, the denizens of Lowshore were not wont to rush with remarkable unanimity to the shrine. It would have seemed, indeed, as if the drama were a dead letter in the seaport, the audience which came to be subdued by pity and terror being generally restricted to some two or three dozen seafaring men smelling strongly of fish, a sprinkling of boys, and a dash of brightness and color in the shape of young women in service, or fishermen's wives and daughters.

But what the drama, whether legitimate or illegitimate, failed to do, the lions succeeded in doing. They drew very fair houses—not the nobility and gentry, as represented by one elderly peer, whose estates bordered Lowshore, but who was rarely known to inhabit his great stone castle, preferring a little box at Richmond, stuffed with rare old silver and costly curios; and the vicar; but the shopkeepers and their young men and maidens; the few visitors and the lodging-house proprietors; all the seafaring men and their families; the maids-of-all-work and fisher-boys; the policemen off duty and a sprinkling of farmers from inland farms. It was late in October, the very dreariest time of the year, and Herr Prusinowski had come to Lowshore in a speculative humor, just to fill up a blank week in his winter programme.

The house was nearly full on the first night, a trifle less well attended the second, and on the third a considerable falling-off was apparent. Still it was a very fair house for Lowshore. There was a cheerful sprinkling in the pit, a very good gallery. The boxes alone had a cavernous and dismal aspect. The box audience—the upper middle-class of Lowshore, tradespeople and lodging-letters—had exhausted itself. Herr Prusinowski had brought a dramatic company of three with him to support the lions, and to eke out the evening's entertainment with a couple of farces or comediettas. This company consisted of a light comedian, a low comedian, and a comedy lady. The light comedian was the aspiring De la Zouche, who had blossomed from a walking gentleman into the popular provincial

Charles Matthews—white hat, patent-leather boots, light-green trousers, cane, and rapid utterance. The performances began with *Delicate Ground*, and were to conclude with the *Secret*, a farce of an ancient and respectable character.

The lion-tamer, who was a spoilt child of fortune, had a supreme contempt for bad houses, and with a flagrant injustice was wont to wreak upon the innocent few who did come to see him that wrath inspired by the guilty many who stopped away. That is to say, he punished the scanty but admiring audience by scamping his performance, and depriving them of their just due. The dramatic company were accustomed to empty benches and a barren dress-circle.

The weather was against Herr Prusinowski on this particular evening. The north winds came howling across the German Ocean as if they were intent upon sweeping Lowshore from the face of the earth, driving a salt-flavored sleet before them, which well-nigh blinded the adventurous pedestrian. The Herr expressed himself very forcibly about the weather, as he took leave of his family before setting out for the theatre. The comedietta was just over as he went in at the stage-door, and he had to dress in a hurry, struggling into his close-fitting raiment, and girding himself with scarlet and gold, while a feeble little orchestra of four—clarionet, flute, and two fiddles—played some old-fashioned country-dance tunes, what time the audience regaled themselves with prawns and porter. The three lions looked tremendously big on the small stage, awfully real against the back-ground of faded scenery. Robinson was out of sorts. He was sensitive upon the subject of weather, and had an especial aversion to high winds; perhaps some hereditary yearning for Libyan sands or Asia's burning sky—personally he could know nothing about either, having been born in Whitechapel—may have affected him at such times; at any rate the fact remained, cold or blusterous weather disturbed his leonine mind.

The feeble little orchestra made a great struggle to produce a soul-inspiring chord, and came out superbly, the second violin

a trifle in the rear. Herr Prusinowski bounded on to the stage from a rocky set piece, and began his work rather languidly, handling Robinson with a certain amount of caution.

He had got through half his performance, and was leading the three lions round the stage on their hind feet, to the stirring music of the march in "Blue Beard"—stirring even from those poor feeble players—when he heard the opening and shutting of a door at the back of the boxes. He looked up quickly. A gentleman in evening dress was seating himself deliberately in the centre place, a pale-complexioned man, with straight reddish hair. The lion-tamer's heart turned cold. It was the man he had seen at Manchester and Spindlecum, the man whose presence, by some morbid fancy, he associated with the idea of peril to himself. During the last three years he had been always more or less on the look-out for this man, and had never seen him—had begun to congratulate himself upon the probability that he would finish his public career without ever performing before him again; and here he was, in this remote seaport town, watching him with the same eager eyes and hungry face, watching as men watched the gladiators in old time, greedy for their blood.

If he could have brought the entertainment to an abrupt conclusion that instant, he would have done so. He would have willingly returned the people their money, and sacrificed the night's profits to escape performing before that man. He was half inclined to plead sudden illness, bring down the curtain with an apology; but to do that would be to confess himself afraid of that man.

"D—n him!" he muttered to himself, "he shan't see that I am afraid of him. Faster!" he called out to the orchestra, "faster and louder!" and as the music quickened, he urged the animals with his whip.

Robinson, alias Moloch, resented the impertinence with a supressed roar, and from that moment Rudolph Prusinowski lost his presence of mind and lost his temper. He was determined to bate not one of his tricks, to demonstrate to that

cold-blooded wretch in the boxes that he was not afraid of him. He made the animals do more work than usual, looking defiantly at that watchful face in the boxes all the while. The little theatre shook with applause, the pit rose to him, as the good old actors were wont to say; the gallery rang with bravoes.

All in a moment, at the last, in the crowning feat which was to conclude the performance, the bravoes changed to an awful shout of horror. No one could say how it happened, the brute's movements were too rapid for human eyes to follow. Herr Prusinowski was lying on the stage mawled and torn, the lion crouching upon him.

The keeper and a couple of brawny scene-shifters rushed upon the stage; they dragged him from under the infuriated beast insensible and covered with blood, and carried him off to the dressing-room, where the two rival surgeons of Lowshore came rushing in to him five minutes afterwards. Surgery could do nothing; his ribs were crushed to powder, and there was a perforation of the lung and hemorrhage. He breathed stertorously for about half an hour, and then died, without one ray of returning consciousness.

"Strange," the red-haired gentleman used to say afterwards, when he told the story as a pleasant kind of thing after dinner, and in some manner reflecting distinction upon himself; "the poor devil was the second of his trade I saw killed, and I had come across him three times at long intervals in the course of my travels in the north. I take a considerable interest in that sort of thing; there's more excitement about it than there is in the drama. Prusinowski was a very respectable fellow; had saved money, I believe; and left his wife and children comfortably provided for."

THE END.

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